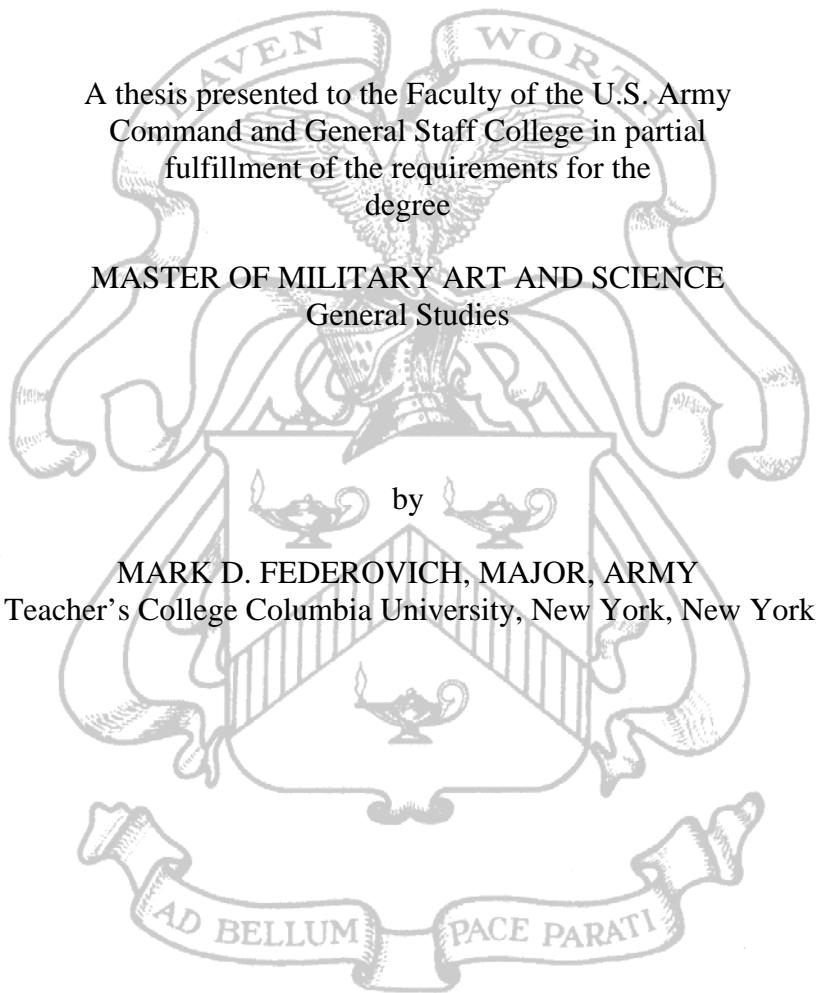


REEVALUATING THE UNITED STATES APPROACH TO CONFLICT  
AND MILITARY INTERVENTION



A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army  
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fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

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General Studies

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## ABSTRACT

### REEVALUATING THE UNITED STATES APPROACH TO CONFLICT AND MILITARY INTERVENTION, by Major Mark D. Federovich, 137 pages.

The realist paradigm is the USG's dominate perspective for conflict analysis. Historically, this perspective has served the United States well, leading to its ascension from colonial possession to global hegemon in less than two centuries. There is mounting evidence, however, that this perspective and its associated approaches are inadequate for the conflicts it is currently and will continue to engage in the 21st Century.

Recent trends suggest that the U.S.' future conflicts will be more emotional and intractable than the ones it traditionally prepared. The realist paradigm with its explicit focus on rational decision-making and substantive issues fails to provide insight into and lacks the concepts, methods, and tools to effectively address intractable conflict's multiple dimensions. The systems paradigm, specifically the dynamical systems approach, provides valuable insights into conflict formation, maintenance, and resolution that practitioners can use to design and monitor more effective resolution strategies. More importantly, it provides an overarching framework that incorporates the relative strengths of multiple conflict paradigms into a cohesive holistic approach.

This thesis argues that adopting a more holistic approach to conflict resolution would increase the effectiveness of USG's international intervention efforts.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE THESIS APPROVAL PAGE .....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
ACRONYMS.....	viii
ILLUSTRATIONS .....	ix
TABLES .....	x
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
Current Approach .....	2
Alternatives .....	4
Primary Research Question .....	7
Secondary Research Questions.....	7
Significance .....	8
Assumptions.....	8
Definitions .....	8
Limitations .....	11
Delimitations.....	11
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	12
The Nature of War .....	12
Cycle of Conflict.....	14
Cold War's Eras Conflict Dynamics.....	19
21st Century Conflict.....	21
Post-Cold War's Effects on the Dynamics of International Conflict .....	21
The New International System.....	23
Disturbing Trends .....	25
Summary and Analysis .....	28
Conclusion .....	32
Emotions and Conflict .....	33
Introduction.....	33
Emotion and Cognitive Functioning.....	34
Behavior and Decision-Making .....	36
Negative Perceptions and Attitudes .....	38

Communication.....	39
Deindividualization and Dehumanization.....	43
Sources of Emotion and Current Conflicts .....	45
Religion and Emotion .....	45
Intra-State Conflicts and Emotion .....	46
Implications.....	48
Persistent or Intractable Conflict .....	49
Introduction.....	49
Intractable Conflicts.....	50
Context.....	51
Issues.....	52
Relationships.....	52
Process .....	53
Outcomes .....	54
Dynamical Systems Approach.....	55
Intractable Conflicts as Attractors .....	57
Attractor Formation .....	60
Feedback Loops .....	61
Collapsing Multidimensionality and Positive Feedback Loops .....	61
Reduction of Negative Feedback Loops.....	63
Resolution Efforts .....	64
Restoring Complexity .....	65
Negative Attractor Deconstruction .....	65
Positive Attractor Formation .....	67
Dynamical Systems Theory Analysis .....	69
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	71
CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS.....	73
Nature of Armed Conflict.....	74
21st Century Conflict.....	74
Location .....	74
Conflict in the Core.....	75
Conflict in the Gap.....	77
Nature .....	79
Emotionality.....	80
Intrastate dynamics .....	80
Issues.....	81
Intractability .....	81
Context.....	81
Issues.....	83
Relations .....	84
Processes .....	85
Outcomes .....	86

Conflict Paradigms .....	87
Realist Paradigm .....	88
Strengths .....	88
Weaknesses .....	89
Human Relations.....	90
Strengths .....	90
Weaknesses .....	91
Systems Paradigm.....	91
Strengths .....	92
Weaknesses .....	92
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	93
Conclusion .....	93
New Approach .....	97
Addressing Context.....	97
Bring Stability .....	97
Addressing Histories of Oppression .....	99
Addressing Issues.....	99
Addressing Root Causes .....	100
Essential Services .....	100
Governance .....	101
Addressing Structural Violence .....	101
Addressing Relationships.....	103
Addressing Processes.....	111
Adjusting Perceptions .....	111
Improving Communication.....	113
Addressing Outcomes .....	115
Summary .....	116
Recommendations.....	117
Do Not Underestimate the Effects of Emotion .....	117
Increase Understanding of Conflict Dynamics .....	119
Increase Exposure .....	119
Actively Collaborate .....	120
REFERENCE LIST .....	122
INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....	127

## ACRONYMS

BATNA	Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement
CAP	Cognitive Affective Patterns
CMM	Coordinated Management of Meaning
DST	Dynamical Systems Theory
ICCC	International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution
LUUUT	stories <u>Lived</u> , stories <u>Untold</u> , stories <u>Unheard</u> , stories <u>Unknown</u> , stories <u>Told</u> , and story <u>Telling</u> .
MEO	Mutually Enticing Opportunity
MHS	Mutually Hurting Stalemate
SGA	Small Group Advisor
USG	United States Government
USIP	United States Institute for Peace

## ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
Figure 1. Cycle of Conflict.....	18
Figure 2. Exaggerated Construals Between Partisans .....	40
Figure 3. A Dynamical System with Two Attractors (A and B).....	59
Figure 4. Perceived Incompatibility in Intense Conflicts.....	105
Figure 5. Actual Group Variance in Perceptions, Attitudes, and Goals.....	106
Figure 6. Religion.....	107
Figure 7. Profession.....	108
Figure 8. Social Issues and Supraordinate Goals .....	109
Figure 9. Composite View of Relationship After Analysis.....	111

## TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Secondary Research Questions .....	72
Table 2. Conflict Location Analysis .....	79

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

As the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq near their eighth and ninth years respectively, support for the military intervention has decreased domestically and abroad. Both foreign and domestic critics have contended that US foreign policy and military efforts lack the requisite nuance to be effective. Specifically, sources have criticized the military's approach to contingency operations and peacekeeping. These criticisms have centered on the military's perceived failure to adapt to what many see as drastic changes in the conflict landscape of the 21st Century. Critics argue that the military has failed to recognize that the end of the Cold War drastically affected the international system and that these changes significantly impacted the nature of conflicts the military would face in the future. They contend that the U.S. military has been excessively slow in adjusting its training, doctrine, tactics, organization, and strategies to effectively adapt to the changing threat and nature of conflict. They point to a steady progression away from large-scale conventional wars fought between nation-states driven by rational goals and the military's continued reliance on traditional statist techniques and mechanisms as evidence of the military's failure to adapt with the changing international system.

To be fair, the U.S. military is not the only target of this criticism. The entire United States Government (USG) is believed to be complicit in this failure to adapt. They have both fallen victim to previous successes and become entrenched in the strategies that previously produced positive results in the past irrespective of mounting evidence that traditional diplomacy and military interventions are incapable of positively influencing 21st Century conflicts. Critics argue that these intervention's inability to

effectively address intense emotional conflicts is directly responsible for the large number of persistent or intractable conflicts.

Some of the harshest criticisms leveled against the military have not come from external sources, but have come from within. Multiple internal sources have been critical of the military's failure to effectively use its counterinsurgency history to guide its current efforts. They cite experiences from Iraq and Afghanistan that echo lessons learned from previous contingency operations. They argue that effectively harnessing the lessons of history could have greatly increased the military's efficiency and effectiveness, thus saving lives in both theaters. The military's failure to incorporate lessons from previous conflicts to guide operations in Iraq and Afghanistan is certainly a legitimate criticism. An equally legitimate criticism that fails to garner attention in military circles is the U.S.'s failure to incorporate theory from multiple schools of conflict resolution in its counter insurgency doctrine and practice. To date, the USG's thought on conflict, its formation, maintenance, and resolution, has been narrowly focused.

### Current Approach

There are three defining characteristics of U.S. approach to international armed conflict. It approaches conflict rationally, frames and analyzes it using the realist paradigm, and relies on statist based interventions to affect change. These defining characteristics are the product of the academic backgrounds of senior policy makers, the U.S. unique geographic location, and its historical experience.

The realist paradigm is the dominant perspective taught in the history, political science, and international affairs disciplines. Because most military professionals and national security experts are formally trained in these fields, it is the predominant lens

they use to analyze conflict. This paradigm views conflict as a legitimate incompatibility of interests between parties caused by scarcity of resources, power imbalances, legitimate values differences, and differing levels of needs satisfaction. Parties engage in conflict to compete for their share of resources and power. There is an assumption that the decisions and actions of disputants are rational choices to gain a strategic advantage. The primary tool in this paradigm is power. Parties use power to defend their autonomy and compel others to do their will. This use of power to dominate and control is not only acceptable, it is one of the defining characteristics of the paradigm (Coleman 2006b, 542-543).

This predisposition to the realist perspective is reinforced by the U.S.' historical experience and relatively secure geographic location. Its close ties with European powers and involvement in European affairs has provided it with a wealth of experiences that support the validity of the realist view of conflict. Discussions of geopolitics, balance of power, containment, mutually assured destruction and strategic advantage are all congruent with this perspective. Another important aspect of U.S. history is that its entire experience on the international stage has been during the age of nation-states. This has led it to view the nation-state as the primary actor, target, and level of influence in the international system and the adoption of statist based approaches for intervention. It, therefore, focuses the preponderance of its conflict intervention and resolution efforts at the state level, often balking at opportunities to negotiate with, through, or otherwise deal with non-state actors.

The relative security that the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans provide allows the U.S. to take a very rational approach to international armed conflict. Often free of clear and eminent danger, the U.S. can afford to view the situation more objectively than those

under direct pressure.<sup>1</sup> This has historically allowed the U.S. to determine whether to engage in conflict based on a thorough cost-benefit analysis. So while the U.S. may have become emotionally invested in the conflict once they commit to a course of action, their initial decision to become involved is a strategic choice. Even when the U.S. has taken a less pragmatic and a more idealistic slant to international affairs, they have still taken a very rational approach to overseas intervention. Even the U.S. entry into World War II to thwart Hitler's attempts to lead a racist revolution bent on the extermination of entire ethnicities did not occur until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, they had restructured the country's industrial infrastructure, and prepared the military. So regardless of whether it was a desire to advance an idealistic agenda, defend a strategic ally or gain strategic advantage, the U.S. traditionally engages in conflict from a rational perspective.

### Alternatives

While the realist paradigm is the dominant conflict paradigm for U.S. policy makers, it is not the only one. Many critics from other schools argue that the realist paradigm's view of conflict is inappropriate for 21st Century conflict, actually exacerbating conflict situations. They claim it fails to grasp the complexity of the conflict and ignores its psychological and relational aspects. They contend it falsely assumes rational decision-making and minimizes emotion's effect on conflict. They feel that

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<sup>1</sup>The notable exceptions to this are the Revolutionary War of 1776 and the American Civil War. Anomalies in the U.S. experience, these conflicts were fought on U.S. soil and deemed credible threats to the viability of the USG. While fought on U.S. soil the War of 1812 and Mexican War were not credible threats and thus less emotional and bitterly contested.

interventions derived from the realist school are overly reliant on power strategies and that the U.S. exclusive use of this lens limits its analysis and intervention alternatives.

Two paradigms that may provide new insights into conflict formation, maintenance, and resolution are the human relations and systems paradigm. Having emerged from the field of social organizational psychology, the human relations paradigm views conflict as a damaged or destructive relationship between parties. This orientation views the quality of social interaction between parties as the most important determinant in conflict formation, maintenance, and resolution (Coleman 2006b, 543). Strong negative emotions and their effects on perceptions, attitudes, and goals are seen as the primary impediment to constructive engagement and positive interaction between disputants (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 102-12). Issues of trust, justice, interdependence, and violence are of particular interest for this approach to conflict resolution. Based on these assumptions, the human relations paradigm attempts to address conflict by limiting the effect of strong negative emotions; redressing issues of trust, violence, and injustice; and creating an environment that is conducive to effective communication, engenders empathy, and facilitates cooperation. Central to this philosophy is the belief that many conflicts contain integrative or win-win solutions that will benefit both parties if the problem is properly framed and the parties are able to work together.

The systems perspective uses the biological metaphor of a simple living cell made up of multiple interdependent parts inside of increasingly complex environments to visualize conflict (Coleman 2006b, 544). Thus, a simple interpersonal conflict between neighbors is actually a complex interaction of interdependent variables; interests, values, and perceptions, for example, that are nested and affected by the systems they are

embedded in, their neighborhood region, and culture for example. The complex and constantly evolving interaction of these variables leads to the formation of a fluctuating non-linear relationship between them. Thus, a change in one element does not result in a proportional or consistent change in others. This makes prediction difficult, leaving interveners capable of only anticipating general shifts in the conflict not specific outcomes (Coleman 2006a, 327). Because of the inherent complexity of conflicts, the systems view presumes that effective resolution necessitates a more holistic approach. It recommends a multi-disciplinary approach that incorporates theory, research, and methods from multiple paradigms to address and achieve results across multiple interdependent objectives, mutual security, trust, violence, oppression, healing, and communication for example (Coleman 2006b, 544-545).

In light of the criticism that the USG is not using the appropriate lens to analyze and develop intervention strategies for current conflicts, this paper attempts to answer the following questions. Is the USG's approach to international armed conflict appropriate for Twenty-first Century conflict?<sup>2</sup> Are other, specifically the human relations and systems, conflict paradigms better equipped to address the conflicts the military will face in the future? Do these perspectives offer new and valuable insights on conflict formation, maintenance, and resolution that could increase the US military's effectiveness in its current operations?

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<sup>2</sup>This paper does not assert that the nature of armed conflict has fundamentally changed. In fact, a historical analysis of armed conflict demonstrates the dynamic and possible cyclical nature of armed conflict. When the paper explores and analyzes the changing nature of armed conflict, it is simply examining potential differences between the conflicts the U.S. will likely engage in and the ones it has traditionally prepared.

Clearly, to adequately answer these questions the paper must explore multiple areas of research and theory. Chapter 2, the literature review will focus on three primary areas, the nature of armed conflict, both its general nature and the specific nature of conflict the U.S. is likely to engage in; emotions and their effects on conflict's formation, dynamics and resolution; and conflict intractability. Through this review and subsequent analysis, the paper will evaluate the appropriateness of the USG's current approach to international armed conflict, identifying potential short comings and recommending possible remedies.

#### Primary Research Question

Is the U.S. current approach to international military intervention appropriate for the conflicts it will likely engage in the Twenty-first Century?

#### Secondary Research Questions

1. Are the conflicts the U.S. will likely engage in the Twenty-first Century significantly different than those it has traditionally prepared?
  - a. Is there a general nature of armed conflict?
  - b. Where is armed conflict likely to occur in the Twenty-first Century?
  - c. What is the specific nature of these conflicts?
2. Do emotions significantly affect conflict dynamics?
3. Does conflict intractability affect intervention efforts?
4. Is the realist approach to conflict appropriate for Twenty-first Century conflict?
5. Are other, specifically the human relations and systems, conflict paradigms better equipped to address the conflicts the military will face in the future?

6. Do these perspectives offer new and valuable insights on conflict formation, maintenance, and resolution that could increase the US military's effectiveness in its current operations?

### Significance

There is a plethora of research and theory from multiple academic disciplines dedicated to understanding conflict and its resolution. The military and USG has largely ignored this potential resource, opting for discovery learning when presented with complex intractable conflicts. Additionally, the theoretical base the military has drawn on comes exclusively from the realist paradigm of conflict. This paper examines the nature of current international conflict and the strengths of multiple conflict paradigms to determine which is most appropriate.

### Assumptions

The two primary assumptions made for the writing of this paper are that the United States will remain heavily involved in international affairs, placing it in conflict with others and the United States military will play an integral role in the nation's efforts to manage, suppress, or resolve these conflicts.

### Definitions

Attractor: an equilibrium or reliable pattern a dynamical system consistently returns to after temporary perturbations. Attractors effectively channel a group's behavior and cognitions into a narrow range of options, making their patterns stable overtime in spite of varied situations (Coleman et al. 2007, 4-5).

Collapsing multidimensionality: The positive alignment of beliefs, attitudes and feelings with group memberships so they begin to reinforce each other (Coleman 2006a, 335).

Conflict Paradigm, human relations: Conflict paradigm that views conflict as a damaged or destructive relationship between parties. This orientation views the quality of social interaction between parties as the most important determinant in conflict formation, maintenance, and resolution (Coleman 2006b, 543).

Conflict Paradigm, realist: Conflict paradigm that views conflict as a legitimate incompatibility of interests between parties caused by scarcity of resources, power imbalances, legitimate values differences, and differing levels of needs satisfaction, assumes parties pursue rational strategies to gain advantage, and sees power as the primary tool to achieve objectives (Coleman 2006b, 542-543).

Conflict Paradigm, systems: uses the biological metaphor of a simple living cell made up of multiple interdependent parts inside of increasingly complex environments to visualize conflict. The complex and constantly evolving interaction of variables leads to the formation of a fluctuating non-linear relationship between them (Coleman 2006b, 544).

Dehumanization: The belief that another is less than human and is not entitled to the rights guaranteed by societal norms (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 112).

Deindividualization: A psychological process that occurs when individuals in a group are no longer seen as unique. Instead, personal differences are ignored and all members of the opposition are perceived to personify the negative characteristics of that group (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 112).

Dynamical systems: Dynamical systems are a collection of interdependent elements that evolve overtime.

Feedback loops, negative: Mechanisms that inhibit feelings or behaviors along their current path or trajectory often decreasing their intensity.

Feedback loops, positive: Mechanisms that stimulate feelings or behaviors along their current path or trajectory often increasing their intensity.

Goal interdependence, negative: Situation where the attainment of one party's goal is negatively correlated to the attainment of another party's (Deutsch, 2006, page 24)

Goal interdependence, positive: Situation where the attainment of one party's goal is directly correlated to the attainment of another party's (Deutsch, 2006, page 24)

Intractable conflict: A conflict that is "recalcitrant, intense, deadlocked, and extremely difficult to resolve." (Coleman, 2006 page 429)

Limbic system: neurological system, largely governed by the amygdala, responsible for automatic emotional responses or instincts. It regulates the physiological generated fight or flight reactions to perceived threats that are designed to remove the individual from eminent danger (Linder 2006, 271).

Mutually hurting stalemate (MHS): A situation where the costs of conflict exceed the potential benefits for both parties, motivating them to explore alternatives (Coleman et al. 2008, 5).

Mutually enticing opportunity (MEO): A situation where the potential benefits of alternate course motivate both parties cease contending (Coleman et al. 2008, 5).

Statist based approaches: Intervention efforts that view the nation-state as the primary actor, target, and level of influence in the international system

Tunnel vision: When strong negative emotions effectively limit a party's perceptions, which leads to the development of suboptimal strategies and flawed decision-making.

### Limitations

The primary limitation of this paper is that its analysis and conclusions are drawn from existing research and theory. Additionally, because of the inherent complexity of intractable conflict systems, this study's conclusions are difficult to prove or refute. Finally, the dynamical systems approach to conflict resolution is in its infancy with little data to support its applicability. The theory and models are currently more descriptive than prescriptive. Little work has been published to provide insights into functionality outside the conceptual arena.

### Delimitations

Conflict is not inherently positive or negative. If managed properly, conflict can initiate necessary change and lead to creative solution to complex problems where both parties achieve a level of satisfaction they are incapable of attaining individually. This paper, however, only addresses dysfunctional conflicts. It also focuses exclusively on large scale violent conflict. There is no discussion of intra or interpersonal conflicts or those with little associated violence. Additionally, this paper will focus on existing theory and research with an explicit goal to make it more applicable, not prove its validity through historical analysis.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

War may not spring from them [emotions] but they will still affect it to some degree, and the extent to which they do so will depend not on the level of civilization but on how important the conflicting interests are and on how long their conflict lasts.

— Carl von Clausewitz

When two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers

— African proverb to describe the Cold War

When two elephants make love, it is still the grass that suffers

— Ali Mazrui to describe the post- Cold War era

#### The Nature of War

The first topic to address in determining if the USG needs to refine or alter its approach to conflict intervention is examining the general nature of war. In his seminal work, *On War* the military theorist, Carl von Clausewitz, has provided one of the most accepted and respected analysis of war. So it is a logical place to start.

In writing *On War*, Clausewitz attempted to investigate the essence of the phenomena of war and thus outline an overarching theory for it (Clausewitz 1976, 61). One of his primary objectives was to identify and then explain the true nature of war. Clausewitz began his examination by defining war and its nature in the abstract. He refers to this as absolute war. This is war in its purest form, unconstrained by any practical restraints. In this state, war is taken to its logical extremes with the application of maximum force to disarm enemies and compel them to do your will because the reciprocal nature of conflict ensured that if you did not, your enemy certainly would (Clausewitz 1976, 77-78).

Fortunately, to achieve its pure form, war must meet a set of conditions that cannot be attained outside the world of abstraction and theory. War would have to be a discrete act isolated from external influences that achieves a complete and final decision to realize its true character (Clausewitz 1976, 78). In reality, war can never be a completely isolated act, free of external influences, and its result is never final (Clausewitz 1976, 78-80). Therefore, war is never capable of achieving its absolute standard and perfect state.

Thus, having removed it from the requirement of logical extremes, war is free to assume natures ranging in intensity from wars of extermination to deterrence or observance. In this state, political objective becomes increasingly important (Clausewitz 1976, 80- 81). Therefore, the level of intensity surrounding a party's motivations for conflict and how important the issue is to the party will determine the conflict's level of intensity. The more important the issue or intense the motivations are the greater the conflict's intensity. Parties will be increasingly willing to exert additional effort and accept increased risk to achieve desired end states in intense conflicts. Additionally, they are likely to be more committed to defeating the other belligerent, causing war to more closely resemble its true character with close alignment of political and military objectives (Clausewitz 1976, 87-88). Conversely, if the issues are less important, belligerents will exert less effort, accept less risk, and view the destruction of the enemy as less necessary. This will result in the nature of war diverging significantly from its absolute form, appearing more political than military in nature (Clausewitz 1976, 87-88). This places policy and reason in a position/role to limit emotion and thus the intensity of the conflict.

Consequently, Clausewitz argues war or conflict as a total phenomenon consists of a paradoxical trinity of emotion, reason, and chance. In this conceptualization, the nature of war is determined by the varying relationship of three deep-rooted tendencies, primordial violence, hatred, and violence; the play of chance and probability; and reason (Clausewitz 1976, 89). Of these variables chance and probability are the constant. Regardless of the conflict, chance is always present and remains generally constant. Therefore, the nature of war is determined by the relative influence of the passions driving the conflict and the constraints provided by reason and policy. Because of the variable nature of this relationship, each conflict is unique with its specific nature being determined by the relative strength of passions and reason (Clausewitz 1976, 89).

### Cycle of Conflict

It is not surprising that Clausewitz drew this conclusion, considering the time period in which he lived and wrote. He drafted *On War* during a time of tremendous political turmoil. The French Revolution had threatened the international system created by the Treaty of Westphalia.

Prior to the French Revolution, a period of relative peace and stability reigned in Europe. The Treaty of Westphalia effectively reinstated order in a world that had been consumed by bloody religious war. The Treaty did this and that. Its primary effect was to dampen the fervor and zealousness that typified the wars of religion that raged across the European continent. It accomplished this by creating the modern nation state and establishing decisions of foreign policy and war as the exclusive purview of the monarch. Removing the populace from decisions of war and foreign policy greatly reduced the passion surrounding conflict. It diminished both the aims and resources states were

willing to commit to wage wars. Any possible gain from conflict was carefully balanced against its potential risk to internal order and international status quo (Knox and Murray 2001, 58-61). This was clearly an age dominated by reason. War was subordinate to and truly an instrument of policy not emotion.

The French Revolution changed all of this. It made war an affair of the people, reintroducing a level of passion and emotion to warfare absent since the wars of religion more than a century prior (Clausewitz 1976, 592-593). It replaced the limited aims of previous wars, with objectives driven by political idealism and an unquenchable desire to spread nationalism and the universal equality of man for the French and preservation of the feudal system for the rest of Europe. This reemergence of emotion and subsequent loftier aims lead to a significant increase in the resources France was willing to commit and risk to secure military victory (Knox and Murray 2001, 62-65). War untrammeled by the constraints of the old system and fired by the ideals of the Revolutionary Era approached its true character throughout Europe (Clausewitz 1976, 593).

Initially, these changes in warfare occurred only in France, but to survive the juggernaut of war that mass politics and nationalism had made the French the other European nations soon followed parts of the French example. They committed increasingly large amounts of resources and removed conventional restraints from their preparation and execution of war (Clausewitz 1976, 592-593). Initially, to compete with the French and Napoleon, other European nations attempted to imitate only the French military reforms. To replicate French success, however, broader and more sweeping societal changes needed to occur (Knox and Murray 2001, 62-65). This resulted in sweeping unintended changes across Europe. Mass politics placed the populace and the

passions they represented at the fore of international relations and war. As a result, Europe was consumed in a series of wars fought over nationalistic ideals, first to resist the French and then to assert their own rightful dominance, justified by feelings of nationalistic pride and entitlement (Knox and Murray 2001, 62-65).

Clausewitz drew a striking conclusion from watching the other European powers inexorably follow the French lead into the abyss of emotionally driven war. He deduced that each time period has its own particular and unique nature of war determined by the relative strengths of passion and reason. He concluded that while the aims and resources allocated towards their attainment are influenced by the particular characteristics of the belligerent, they must also conform to the spirit and nature of the age (Clausewitz 1976, 594).

Toward the end of his work, Clausewitz pondered the future of war. Would it continue along its current trajectory or would the state regain exclusive control of foreign and defense policy, removing the passion from war and reinstating traditional constraints? Without the advantage of foresight, he did not dare to guess (Clausewitz 1976, 593).

Armed with advantages of historical perspective, it is clear that the nationalistic fervor initiated by the French Revolution continued to shape the nature of war into the 20th Century. Wars of intense emotion spread across Europe in a representation of nationalistic fervor until the National Socialist Party in their racist quest to establish a master race took nationalistic fervor to its extreme. World War II represented the high water mark for nationalistic wars of dominance. Its conclusion led to a gradual increase in the relative strength of reason over power in the nature of war. It issued in a new era of

reason in spite of surface indications that the conflict between the United States and Soviet Union would be the next ideological conflict bitterly contested over nationalistic pride.

Two factors are primarily responsible for the rise of reason, a glimpse into the darkest corners of human potential and the advent of a revolutionary new weapon. Much like the Europeans of the 1600s, the industrialized world was sickened by the carnage wrought by the nationalistic wars of their era. Hitler's final solution and Japan's brutal treatment of all non-Japanese clearly demonstrated the new level of danger possible that unchecked nationalism represented and differentiated it from the previous wars of the 20th Century. Additionally, the atomic bomb's unmatched destructiveness had a very real and sobering effect on the world. For the first time ever, the idea of global annihilation was a reality. The dropping of the bomb forced humans to come to terms with the grim idea of a world without a future (Boyer 1994, 4-5; Hogan 1996, 156, 164). The Holocaust and the advent of the atomic bomb encouraged the curbing of the passions surrounding nationalism and provided the restraint necessary to usher in a new era of reason. In conflict resolution theory, this is referred to a Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS). It is when a condition exists that both parties to a conflict find unacceptable. This provides the motivation for both parties to search for alternatives to the conflict status quo (Coleman et al. 2008, 5). In effect, a Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA) does not exist for either party. As a result of this MHS, the Allies established a new international system following World War II with the United Nations at its center. The expressed intention of this and other measures was to decrease the likelihood of future conflict and limit any conflict's aims and scope.

If the historical trends highlighted in the preceding analysis/ discussion are graphically depicted, general shifts in the relative nature of war become apparent (see figure 1). The wars of religion fought between 1521 and 1648 closely resemble war approaching its true character, while the period immediately following the Treaty of Westphalia characterized by limited aims and a reluctance to accept risk or allocate significant resources is more consistent with war of reason. The French Revolution reestablished passion as the dominant factor in the paradoxical trinity. This led to general rise in the emotionality of conflict that culminated with World War II and the dropping of the atomic bomb. What followed was a return to limited objective wars and relatively low risk engagements. This provides additional credence to Clausewitz's assertion that each age has a spirit and particular form of war, while its essential nature remains a balance of policy, emotion, and chance.

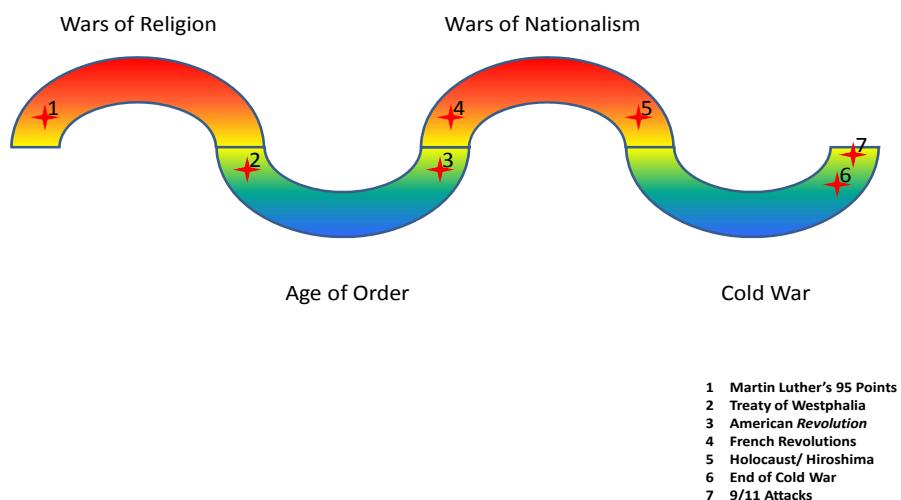


Figure 1. Cycle of Conflict

Source: Created by author.

Having established the dual nature of armed conflict, it appears that multiple frames of conflict are justified and certain situations lend themselves to different paradigms. The determining factor for which lens is most appropriate for analyzing the conflict and guiding intervention strategies and efforts is the relative strength of passion and emotion. This appears to indicate that based on the relative importance the human relations paradigm places on the social and psychological aspects of conflict, it is more appropriate for conflicts intensely emotional. A more traditional statist perspective is more appropriate for those governed by geopolitical concerns, balance of power concerns, strategic advantage, or reason. The systems paradigm, due to its inclusive nature, may be able to span the gap, incorporating aspects of other paradigms and providing insight into the entire spectrum of conflict. However, to effectively answer the earlier question and determine if the realist perspective is inappropriate for U.S. military's current conflicts an additional question must be answered. Are the conflicts/wars the military is currently engaged governed more by emotion or reason?

### Cold War's Eras Conflict Dynamics

Following the cessation of combat operations in World War II, the U.S. found itself engaged in an ideological struggle with the Soviet Union. Fearing Soviet designs to exploit the power vacuum created by World War II, the U.S. engaged in a strategy of containment to limit Soviet influence in regions deemed critical to U.S. strategic interests. The strategy of Containment was based on the belief that the Soviet Union was unwilling to risk a decisive confrontation to gain increased influence or territory. Unlike Germany, the Soviets would likely withdraw if they encountered strong resistance (Keenan 1946). Though there were tense moments between the superpowers, the belief

that the Soviets would withdraw rather than risk direct confrontation proved generally true. The two superpowers' militaries never did clash directly and for all the hostile rhetoric and seemingly inconsolable ideological differences the conflict remained amazingly rational and stable at the macro-level.

The effects of the Cold War on conflict were much more ambiguous for the rest of the world. It had two primary, if contradicting, conflict related effects on the period. The first is it suppressed many of the internal conflicts that existed inside each sphere of influence. Conflicts between states clearly inside of one superpower's or the other's sphere rarely escalated to the point of violence in spite of existing issues. This suppression effect was especially apparent in Eastern Europe and Central Asia where new borders were seemingly drawn arbitrarily during and immediately following the World Wars. These boundaries established countries irrespective of religious, ethnic, and cultural fault lines, yet they resulted in few open conflicts (Lederach 2004, 7).

The suppression effect was no less real in the West. Bound by a commitment to defeat the Soviet Union and the oppressive style of government it represented, Western powers set aside their differences to work together to achieve the common goal (Kegan 2003, 72-73). This was no small feat considering the animosity that existed between the Western Allied and Axis powers.

The second primary effect of the Cold War was to intensify conflicts in the developing world (Lederach 2004, 7). Locked in a struggle to assert their dominance over the other, but unwilling to engage in direct conflict because of the awesome potential costs, the U.S. and Soviet Union engaged through proxies in or over states that were loosely or unaligned with a particular superpower. The intent was to grow their sphere

and gain a strategic advantage, initiating a chain of events that would result in their eventual domination. Each attempted to do this through alternating foreign aid and support to dissidents to bolster or subvert support for a particular pole in the conflict. Both parties exploited existing rifts and internal conflicts for their benefit. This frequently exacerbated conditions in areas already deficient in meeting the individual basic needs of security, subsistence, health care, housing, and education for their populations. This almost invariably intensified existing conflicts (Lederach 2004, 8). The Cold War dynamics also provided an overarching context for almost all violent conflicts of the period. It framed them all as ideological struggles between competing economic and political systems regardless of whether there were more fundamental underlying issues and interests at stake (Lederach 2004, 7).

## 21st Century Conflict

### Post-Cold War's Effects on the Dynamics of International Conflict

The dramatic end of the Cold War precipitated by the disintegrations of the Soviet bloc and later the Soviet Union rendered the dominant schema for international affairs of the previous four decades obsolete. Many viewed its end as a pivotal moment in international relations, one of great hope and potential peril. When the Soviet Union fell, there was a rush of authors from various schools that attempted to predict the future of international affairs and conflict in this new uni-polar world. A small minority heralded the end of the Cold War as the beginning of an unprecedented period of peace. They believed that the end of the Cold War would eliminate the destabilizing effects of the two superpowers' constant struggle for supremacy and usher in a new era of pervasive

democratic ideals fulfilling the liberal idealist vision of peace. Others feared that the fall of the Soviet Union would upset the global balance of power to a degree never seen in the age of nation-states. They predicted that the relative power advantage the United States would enjoy would result in a chaotic international environment where violent conflict and anarchy reigned (Hobsbawm 1994, 558-60).

Neither of these extreme predictions has come to pass. The past twenty years have demonstrated that the revolutionary change predicted by both groups of prognosticators were inaccurate (Lederach 1997, 7). This is not to say, however, that the end of the Cold War has not changed the dynamics of conflict. In fact, while there has been some consistency, there has also been significant change to the conflict landscape since the end of the Cold War.

A macro-level analysis of conflict since the end of the Cold War reveals some interesting trends. For example, the number of violent armed conflicts has remained relatively stable even though the location of some of these conflicts has changed. Additionally, there has been a marked increase in the number of small scale conflicts in the former Soviet bloc (Lederach 2004, 8). This is not surprising because that region experienced the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the relegation of the principal power behind it, Russia, to the role of fledgling regional hegemon. Incapable of preventing the self-dismemberment of their own country, they were unable to suppress many of the underlying conflicts that festered in their former bloc. Long suppressed anger fueled by years of oppression and unequal treatment began to surface throughout the former Soviet sphere of influence. This led to rising tensions between former bloc members. Tensions between the Ukraine and Poland, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Russia and Georgia are

more of a rule now than an exception. Once strategically aligned, these countries increasingly find their interests diverging.

Additionally, the inability of Russia to effectively suppress conflict in their region has resulted in the emergence of a series of internal identity based conflicts in Central and Eastern Europe (Lederach 2004, 5-8). The most notable of these is the conflict in the former Yugoslavia that surfaced once the conflict suppressing pressures of the Cold War were removed. While this conflict is the one that received the most attention and the only one that the U.S. military participated, similar problems exist in Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and other countries.

One consistent trend between periods is the majority of the world's conflicts still occur in the old Cold War hotbeds of Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia (Lederach 2004, 9). Even after the end of the Cold War and the associated struggle between capitalism and communism, conflict is endemic in these regions. The continuation of these conflicts without the overarching ideological spin suggests that traditional explanations were incorrect and suggests that an analysis which concluded that the ideological struggle was the root cause of all conflicts was overly superficial and may have led to faulty assumptions that still inhibit effective intervention. The sustained nature of these conflicts also indicates the likelihood of relational factors among their causes and maintenance. It also highlights the existence of what are referred to as protracted, intractable, or persistent conflicts.

### The New International System

The realization that international conflict was not exclusively the product of competition between superpowers and the clash of incompatible political and economic

ideologies led to a host of theorists advancing new theories for the causes of post-Cold War conflict. Obviously having a vested interest in the future of conflict, the military has been quite attentive to this discussion, often playing an active role in it. Theories citing the forces of globalization, resource scarcity, cultural differences, and relative deprivation have all gained particular traction in military circles. Each is included in a series of readings as part of the military's joint professional military education program (How do I cite C100 syllabus). While there are differences between the theories, there are significant commonalities with each providing a fuller understanding of the emerging international system.

First the good news, there is evidence that the new international system exerts significant pressure that decreases the likelihood of state on state armed conflict. In the Lexus and the Olive Branch, columnist Thomas Friedman, advances a new framework for international affairs. He posits that globalization is not a trend or fad, it is a de-facto international system that effectively replaced the bi-polar balance of power system that characterized the Cold War (Friedman 2000, 122). Globalization has resulted in a high level of interdependence between states in the system, linking their economic and political well-being to the stability of the international system. This generates pressure on states to constrain armed conflict, reducing the likelihood that armed conflict will be economically rational. In effect, globalization has resulted in the costs of conflict outpacing potential rewards.

The bad news is that all states are not equally in the system (Friedman 2000, 133). Generally broken down into two distinct groups, the haves and the have nots, all countries are not equally invested in the current system. Those privileged by the system

are more apt to adjust their goals based on stability considerations than those disadvantaged by it. While there is no clear or static dividing line between what is frequently referred to as the Core and the Gap, there are certainly identifiable characteristics. Core countries tend to have functioning stable governments, low crime, and relatively high standards of living. Gap countries, on the other hand, are typified by high crime, a generally low standard of living, and corrupt inept governments that struggle to meet their population's basic needs (Barnett 2003, 135).

Gap countries are incubators for conflict for a variety of reasons. Their internal conditions and oppressive governments make them ripe for internal strife and civil war. The governments' inability to provide baseline services or security engenders resentment and little allegiance from the populace. Instead, people frequently form new allegiances along ethnic, tribal, or clan lines. A perceived and in many cases real scarcity of resources in these countries only exacerbates the problem. Governments and other groups frequently attempt to hoard these resources to cement or gain power. This hoarding by one group at the expense of others sets the stage for violent armed conflict (Kaplan 1994, 83-91). These conflict inducing dynamics will likely worsen as environmental disasters, shortages of food, mass urbanization, and population explosions in these countries increase the demand for resources and further strain governments already struggling to provide basic services for their populations (Kaplan 1994, 91).

### Disturbing Trends

The conditions in Gap countries are responsible for the two disturbing trends. Gap countries have a disproportionate amount of armed conflict and the rise of intra-state conflict (Lederach 2004, 17; Barnett 2003, 137). At first glance, the transition from

international to internal conflict appears to be a positive trend because it suggests that intrastate conflicts are more easily contained and are less destabilizing. This is in fact untrue for two reasons. First, the belligerent's familiarity with the other often leads to a more personal and violent nature of conflict because it frequently involves long-standing animosities (Lederach 2004, 17-18). Second, the growing interdependence globalization generates often causes internal conflicts to have a destabilizing effect on the region and indirectly the entire system (Lederach 2004, 11-12). The same forces that limit conflict in the Core actually increase the likelihood that intrastate conflicts will internationalize and involve multiple external stakeholders. So while globalization has a conflict limiting effect between Core states, through a "trickle up" effect, it increases the likelihood that internal conflicts will have a destabilizing effect on the entire system.

Another conflict stimulating effect globalization has is it increases awareness of relative deprivation. The expression that through contact comes understanding is also true for relative deprivation. Increased contact raises a group's awareness of their relatively lower standard of living. In the past, citizens from the Gap may have had less access to resources than their Core counterparts, but they were only vaguely aware of it. Widespread access to the internet and mass media has made many in the Gap acutely aware of these differences, increasing consciousness of relative deprivation. This is important because without awareness of the disparity, relative deprivation does not demonstrate a conflict stimulating effect. In other words, deprivation, itself, does not result in negative perceptions of others and conflict. It is awareness of this deprivation with respect to others that does (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 20).

Conscious awareness of the widening gap between living conditions in the Core and Gap creates the perception or highlights the existence of incompatible interests and a scarcity of resources. Negative perceptions of the Core are a likely byproduct of what is frequently seen as an unjust distribution of resources (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 20). These perceptions increase the likelihood of conflict between Core and Gap states. Iran and North Korea are clear examples of this. These countries clearly resent the U.S.' greater access to resources and international power and perceive their interests as incompatible with the Core's.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, states are not the only actors on the international scene anymore. The inclusion of transnational groups and super-empowered individuals in the international system provides a host of new potential stakeholders with possible grievances. This increases both the complexity of the system and the likelihood of conflict. Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden are perfect examples of transnational groups and super-empowered individuals making an impact on the international system (Friedman 2000, 123-25). Not being recognized by the formal international system, these groups and individuals don't have a vested interest in preserving it. In fact, many wish to alter the status quo.

The final implication of the new international system on conflict is that while war between Core states is less likely, if it does occur, it will be intense (Freidman 2000, 131). To overcome the significant restraints of global interdependence, the issues at stake must be highly important to the country and thus emotional. Issues of religion, culture, or some other issue deemed central to a party's identity are likely the only issues worth the

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<sup>3</sup>Referring to them as the Axis of Evil only exacerbates existing issues.

cost. The danger of this is that conflicts over culture and religion are inherently emotional and thus intensely contested. Cherished cultural beliefs are historically rooted, not easily changed or compromised, and thus central to a person's or group's identity (Huntington 1993, 22-26; Vallacher et al. n.d., 27-28). People are emotionally invested in these issues and derive significant self-worth from them. Any attack that threatens a group's defining characteristics is seen as an attack on the individual, the group, their ancestors, and their way of life. As a result, war over one of these issues will be intensely emotional.

### Summary and Analysis

Conflict in the Core will generally be constrained by the benefits of economic cooperation. Unlike the Cold War, where the threat of nuclear holocaust, a mutually hurting stalemate, constrained the ambitions and passions of potential belligerents, globalization inhibits conflict through a mutually enticing opportunity. The benefits of international stability generally outweigh the advantages of armed conflict for Core states. A rational statist approach is uniquely suited for these conditions. Continuing to engage and build economic, social, and political ties with other Core members will increase interdependence and decrease the likelihood of armed conflict.

If conflict does erupt, however, it is likely to be intense and over highly emotional issues. Likely candidates are culture, religion, and ethnicity. While this will push conflict towards its absolute character, the internal stability of Core countries should still have a restraining effect. Additionally, their internal stability should ensure that matters of international affairs and war remain the purview of the government and not the people. Therefore, states will decide to continue the conflict or pursue peace based on some form of economic rationality. Additionally, if both state governments remain intact and

functional, a body capable of administering the peace and enforcing its accord will remain. As a result, a traditional statist approach is still appropriate in these cases. The conflict may be more emotional, but rational states are still the primary level of influence.

Regrettably, the story in the Gap is less encouraging. There are real and quantifiable disparities in resource availability and power between the Core and the Gap. The Gap's limited access to resources increases their population's propensity for crime, limits the government's ability to provide basic services, and decreases the population's standard of living. All these factors delegitimize existing governments and stimulate internal strife, which destabilizes the country. Because of the "trickle up" effect caused by growing international interdependence, local conflicts will have a destabilizing effect on the region and system.

Conflicts in the Gap also tend to have both substantive and relational causes. Conflicts over scarce resources and unequal power are more substantive while clashes of culture, religion, and identity are more relational. Interestingly, substantive conflicts often transform into relational ones because real and perceived access to resources are frequently tied to group membership (Deutsch 1973, 67-71; Fisher 2006, 180). This can lead to invidious comparisons and the perception that the disparity is unjust. Whether the salient group is clan, religion, country of origin, or a host of other possible group memberships, the conflict becomes as much about negative perceptions and interactions between groups as it does about any substantive issue. In these cases, resolving substantive issues rarely leads to a cessation of ill feelings or the conflict. Additionally, many of conflict's causes appear to be interrelated, working in concert to reinforce each

other. Over time this may result in the development of stable patterns of behavior that resist intervention and result in protracted or intractable conflicts (Coleman 2006b, 534).

Growing global interdependence and the lack of more credible conventional threats will likely force the U.S. to increase its involvement in the Gap. Interventions in the Gap will be especially challenging because of the incredible complexity of these conflict. They contain a mix of interrelated substantive and subjective issues that frequently reinforce each other (Fisher 2006, 180). Because of their fragmented nature, there are rarely parties to coordinate or negotiate with. These two factors make determining causes, developing, and executing intervention strategies difficult.

Additionally, ready access to the internet and mass media has made Gap states more aware of their relative deprivation. This primes them for conflict with the Core, causing them to resent intervention efforts from what they may perceive as the real enemy. This can cause previously warring factions to unite against a common enemy that only became involved to assist them resolve the initial conflict and ease suffering.

Further complicating matters is the fact that the comparison group does not have to be another state for relative deprivation to occur and have a conflict stimulating effect. Memories of the past and envisioned future conditions may also be used to draw unfavorable comparisons with the present. Use of the past for comparison is especially likely if the group had a significant reversal in fortune. Arabs, for example, frequently compare their current international standing with their relative preeminence from the 9th to 15th Centuries (Lewis 2002, 3-6). More recently, the drastic change in relative standards for Sunnis in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan have likely resulted in feelings of relative deprivation and animosity towards those they feel are responsible.

Initially, the increased animosity of certain groups was offset by the surge of optimism and favorable comparisons of other previously oppressed groups. These feelings, however, faded and were replaced when formerly oppressed groups transitioned from comparing their present with their exploited past, instead comparing it to an imagined elevated future state. When current conditions failed to meet expectations, relative deprivation developed, replacing feelings of elation with betrayal.

The shifting nature of comparison groups has significant implications for the military. The fact that combat operations invariably result in a redistribution of power ensures that the military will engender animosity from groups who experience a relative decrease in prestige, power, and access to resources. Additionally, the fact that wars are increasingly fought among the people in urban areas increases the likelihood that the infrastructure will be damaged during major combat operations. This is likely to lead to a decrease in the quality of services available immediately following the cessation of combat operations. This almost ensures unfavorable comparisons with the past. Finally, the perception of U.S. wealth and power has led many around the world to believe that it can accomplish anything. This leads to unrealistic expectations, which eventually lead to disappointment and unfavorable comparisons with anticipated conditions.

Therefore, conditions in the Gap with their complex array of structural, issue, and relation related problems are not conducive to traditional statist interventions for a variety of reasons. Statist based approaches lack the appropriate concepts, methods, and strategies for effective interventions. Their exclusive focus on substantive issues fails to address many of the underlining causes of these conflicts. Conflicts in the Gap are highly emotional and frequently rooted in long-standing historical animosities. As a result, they

are often relational in nature. Thus, even if resolving the substantive issues is possible, it rarely alleviates the conflict (Coleman et al. n.d., 3). Statist strategies lack mechanisms for alleviating these emotional or relational issues between parties. Additionally, they rely on coordination and cooperation with other formal international actors, almost invariably other governments, that frequently do not exist or represent the populace in Gap states (Wessels 2004, 79).

### Conclusion

The U.S. needs to embrace a more holistic approach to conflict intervention and resolution. It must resist the urge to develop simple explanations for complex problems and ensure that its conflict analysis does not devolve into satisficing and selecting the first explanation that appears descriptive.<sup>4</sup> Descriptive explanations for conflict, like the analysis that all Cold War conflict was the result of political and economic ideological

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<sup>4</sup>The most dangerous and alluring of these simple explanations is one offered in the *Clash of Civilizations*. Few cultures or religions are inherently incompatible or intolerant of others. Blaming the current conflicts on a fundamental incompatibility between Islam and the West is not only incorrect, it is dangerous. Islam in fact has a long history of tolerance, especially of the Judea-Christian religions prevalent in the West. The unifying force behind Islam, the Koran, explicitly states tolerance of both religions as an obligation under Sharia law because each practices a religion based on previous divine revelation. According to the Koran, their main failing is not recognizing Mohammed as the true Prophet of God. They are not guilty of the greater offense of failing to recognize the one true God (Lewis 2002, 113-114). Islam, much like Christianity during the Crusades, is being perverted to justify and rationalize violence driven by more ignoble causes. This is not meant to minimize the impact of culture on the current conflict because it does have a significant effect. The fact that the current conflict is being framed as such by both sides mandates that it is addressed. However, neither culture nor religion should be made a scapegoat for conflict like ideology was during the Cold War period. Assuming that certain cultures are fundamentally incompatible limits intervention options. If peaceful coexistence is a not possible outcome, then in an ever-shrinking world subjugation or annihilation is the only option.

differences, tend to be superficial and ultimately incorrect. They lead to inaccurate problem identification and flawed strategies.

Additionally, the military needs to expand its understanding of conflict, especially the role of emotion and intractability. If current trends continue, the conflicts the military is engaged in will be increasingly emotional and protracted in nature. Increasing understanding in these areas will facilitate the development of strategies more appropriate for the conflicts it will likely engage.<sup>5</sup> In an attempt to initiate this process, the portion of the literature review will explore the effects emotions in conflicts and the dynamics of intractability.

### Emotions and Conflict

#### Introduction

Based on the analysis above, conflict in the 21st Century is becoming more emotional in nature. Thus, it is imperative that the military increases its understanding of emotion's effect on conflict. This portion of the paper will examine the bidirectional influence of negative emotions and conflict. The purpose is to identify both the transient and long-term effects of emotions on behavior and relationships. Special attention will be paid to how negative emotions influence interactions between parties, its role in conflict escalation, and its effect on the underlying dynamics of conflict and intractability. It will

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<sup>5</sup>Many may argue that the requirement to meet the challenges to today's brand of conflict lies with other departments and agencies in the government or even with international bodies not with the military. This may be the case, but as the effects of the failure to adapt are most readily experienced by the military, it is irrelevant whose fault or issue it is. It is currently the military's problem. Additionally, the military is best positioned and resourced to meet these challenges, not only in manpower and dollars but also in intellectual capital.

conclude with a brief discussion of the implications of highly emotional conflict on military operations and outline possible strategies for de-escalation and resolution.<sup>6</sup>

### Emotion and Cognitive Functioning

It is beneficial to begin this section with a rough description of how the brain functions. It will focus on how the brain receives, processes, and reacts to stimuli. It is not meant to be, and most certainly is not, an exhaustive discussion. Its intent is to only delve deep enough to demonstrate the multiple effects of emotion on cognition. This will hopefully provide the necessary foundation to illustrate how emotions may affect conflict.

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<sup>6</sup>Because this examination is focused on emotion's negative effects on conflict, it is important to acknowledge up front that emotions have many beneficial effects as well. Feelings of fraternity, love, and admiration can have a significant inhibiting effect on conflict (Linder 2006, 280-283). Relationships that revolve around feelings of friendship and respect rarely devolve into violent conflict. Both parties view and then excuse transgressions as transient, unintentional or unimportant. In positive relationships between allied countries or spouses in healthy marriages, negative feelings are transient and short-lived. This can have some negative effects in conflict situations, but in general it has a limiting effect. Additionally, there is a plethora of research and anecdotal evidence on the beneficial effects of eliciting emotions on organizational or group performance. The entire charismatic or transformational leadership movement is based on harnessing an organization's emotions to increase satisfaction, commitment and performance. More recently, researchers have demonstrated how transformational leadership activates an individual's intrinsic motivation allowing them to shift from individual-oriented, hedonistic, rational models to more collective moral and value driven models (Shamir et al, 1993). This is only possible through the expression of emotions by leaders and followers. This holds for conflict situations as well. In conflict, especially violent ones, individuals and groups are placed in dangerous situations and asked to conduct actions at significant risk. The evocation of strong emotions enables them to overcome their rational fears and sacrifice for the good of the collective. An extreme example of this is Japanese pilots near the end of WWII. These pilots were so emotionally committed to their cause and country that they proudly volunteered to fly their planes into American ships.

In a gross oversimplification, there are two basic systems that govern stimulus response, the limbic and prefrontal. The limbic system, largely governed by the amygdala, predates the prefrontal system both phylogenetically and ontogenically (Linder 2006, 271).<sup>7</sup> During brain development neurons are myelinated, or insulated to speed transmissions. The areas of the neurological system that are myelinated first are the ones deemed most critical for survival. Pathways to the amygdala are evolutionarily programmed to develop faster than those to the prefrontal cortex because the amygdala regulates automatic emotional responses or instincts (Fogel 2004, 212; Fifer, Monk, and Grose-Fifer 2004, 516). These are the physiological generated fight or flight reactions to perceived threats that are designed to remove the individual from eminent danger (Linder 2006, 271; Mischel, DeSmet, and Kross 2006, 299).

For early man and young children, rapid responses to avoid immediate danger was and is more important for their survival than the ability to develop long-term strategies to achieve distant goals. The ability to generate long-term goals and strategies comes as the prefrontal cortex develops. This part of the brain is responsible for more high-level brain function.<sup>8</sup> It regulates emotional response, enables delayed gratification, and facilitates the development of long-term strategies (Mischel, DeSmet, and Kross 2006, 295).

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<sup>7</sup>Development of the species and development of the individual respectively. In many respects the development of an individual human follows the same basic steps as the evolutionary development of the species.

<sup>8</sup>This is why children tend to act more rashly and have larger more intense emotional swings than adults. They are physically limited in their ability to self-regulate. Increasing ability to self-regulate coincides with the myelination of the prefrontal cortex.

As an individual develops, these two systems become interdependent, working together to govern stimulus response and behavior. The limbic system, or hot system, assists individuals avoid immediate danger while the prefrontal cortex, or cool system, allows for the application of reason to develop long-term strategies. Under ideal conditions they coordinate effectively through a series of feedback loops, allowing the individual to develop appropriate responses to a variety of situations (Mischel, DeSmet, and Kross 2006, 299; Linder 2006, 273). Unfortunately for prolonged and complex social interactions, evolutionary design resulted in the pathways to the amygdala being shorter than those to the pre-frontal cortex. Therefore, even after the pathways to both systems are fully myelinated, transmissions to and from the amygdala happen faster than transmissions to the prefrontal cortex area (Fifer, Monk, and Grose-Fifer 2004, 516). Generally, this is not a significant issue because the differences in transmission times are nearly negligible and messages from the pre-frontal cortex arrive in time to regulate behavior. Under stress, however, the hot system's reaction may be strong and rapid enough to override the restraints of the more complex, strategic, and emotionally neutral cool system (Linder 2006, 272-274).<sup>9</sup>

### Behavior and Decision-Making

Strong negative emotions can provide sufficient stimulus to override the feedback mechanisms that facilitate the proper coordination of the two regions in the brain. This results in the hot system dominating in emotionally charged situations, which may have

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<sup>9</sup>PTSD flashbacks are extreme examples of this. In these cases, the emotional response is so intense that it triggers a participative memory where the individual believes they are reliving the triggered experience (Fogel 2004, 211-217).

significant behavioral and cognitive consequences. Behaviorally, fear and anger can lead to rash contentious behavior where parties fail to consider the consequences of their actions (Fisher and Shapiro 2005, 147). The effects of this behavior can be short-lived and transitory, but because of the reciprocal nature of social interaction, it may start an escalation cycle that results in increasingly contentious behavior (Deutsch 2006a, 31-32, 40; Pruitt and Kim 2004, 104).

The effects strong negative emotions have on cognitive functioning are just as significant and have potentially greater long-term consequences. Defaulting to the hot system because of intense feelings of fear or hate can narrow an individual's or group's perceptions, impair their decision-making, and inhibit long-term planning. Decision-making and strategy formulation are complex tasks under optimal conditions with limited processing capacity, incomplete information, perceptual errors, biases, and cultural differences leading to misunderstandings and flawed decisions (Organ and Bateman 1991, 230). Strong negative emotions exacerbate these impediments to cognitive functioning and mental processing because under stress individuals default to their more primitive limbic system to analyze the situation and develop strategies. Fear and anger can lead to "tunnel vision," effectively limiting the party's perceptions, thoughts, and choices. This impaired processing precludes a party's ability to recognize or generate creative integrative solutions to problems. This almost guarantees the development of suboptimal strategies and decisions (Fisher and Shapiro 2005, 146; Linder 2006, 274). Therefore, while the immediate effects of these emotions are short-term, they have long-term consequences. Using unsound strategies based on flawed decisions rarely results in effective conflict resolution and often causes more problems than it solves.

## Negative Perceptions and Attitudes

Overtime the transitory emotions of blame, anger, and fear lead to more permanent structural changes in the relationship. As parties develop a pattern of negative interaction or one conflict persists for an extended period of time, these transient emotions begin to outlast the original conflict and lead to the formation of negative perceptions and attitudes about the other. This has two primary effects, more rapid escalation to contentious behavior by both parties and the perception of conflict where none may exist (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 107-109). More rapid escalation occurs because overtime parties develop cognitive affective patterns (CAP) with respect to interactions with each other (Hannah, Eggers, and Jennings 2008, 29).

Certain environmental stimuli trigger mental and emotional responses or CAPs that influence behavior. CAPs are schemas that serve as mental short cuts to speed information processing. They develop overtime to reduce behavioral response times and free mental energies for more complex tasks. They operate at the semi-conscious level and result in stable patterns of behavior for given situations. They have many positive benefits and are instrumental in instinctive behavior, intuitive decision-making, and the complex integration of high level tasks (Hannah, Eggers, and Jennings 2008, 29). In conflict situations, however, they frequently reinforce negative interactions and result in stimulus control. A condition where the response to a trigger is automatic and uncontrollable (Mishel, DeSmet, and Kross 2006, 298). A negative CAP can result in parties entering future interactions primed for conflict and may lead to the transformation of issues from general to specific (Robinson 1995, 194; Pruitt and Kim 2004, 106). Both

of these possibilities can result in a level of escalation disproportionate to the importance of the issue.

Being sufficiently primed for conflict, it is not surprising that there is a tendency for each party to perceive a conflict where none exists (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 107). The development of negative perceptions leads each party to frame incoming data about the other negatively. Any potentially ambiguous behavior is interpreted as hostile and the worst is assumed of the other. As these perceptions persist, each party becomes more committed to their assessment of the other. They frequently become so anchored in their beliefs that they overemphasize any information that supports their stereotypes and ignore any new information that is inconsistent with their assessment (Organ and Bateman 1991, 232). In this way, the self-reinforcing psychological processes of framing and anchoring result in stable pattern of distrust, animosity, and ultimately destructive interactions.

The development of negative attitudes and perceptions can have significant effect on the interactions of parties in conflict. The two most likely responses to the formation and persistence of negative perceptions are avoiding the other party and becoming increasingly aggressive when forced to interact. Both negatively affect communications between parties, which has a negative effect on the conflict system.

### Communication

A lack of dialogue caused by the parties avoiding each other ensures that they will maintain their misperceptions of the other group. This is especially damaging in conflict situations because each party tends to view the other as ideological extremists, exaggerating their position. Both sides in conflict tend to be more moderate than the other

perceives (see figure 2). As a result, each devalues the other's position as subjective, biased, and irrational (Robinson 1995, 188-189). This leads both parties to frame incoming data negatively, recognizing only information that confirms their preconceived notions (Organ and Bateman 1991, 231). As a result, there is an assumption of diametric differences, where neither side is able to recognize areas of positive goal interdependence and agreement (Robinson 1995, 188-189).

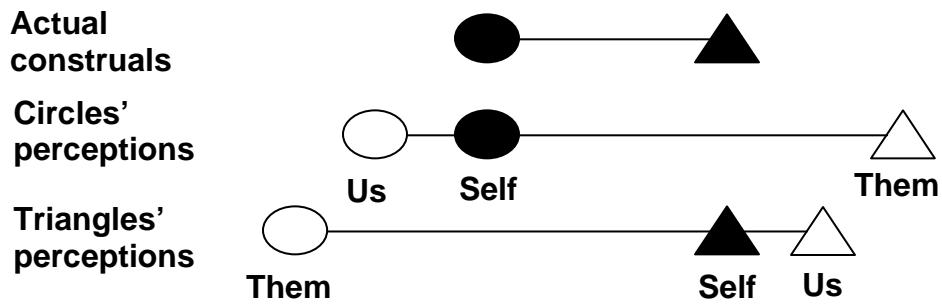


Figure 2. Exaggerated Construals Between Partisans

Source: R.J. Robinson, "The Conflict Competent Organization," In *Negotiation as a Social Process*, eds. R. M. Kramer, and D. M. Messick, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 1995).

If the parties do not choose or are physically unable to avoid each other as they often are in conflict situations because of physical proximity, the emotional nature of their relationship makes it unlikely that any discourse will be constructive. Rather than gaining a fuller appreciation of the other parties position, which is the goal of communication, interactions devolve into antagonistic exchanges aimed at injuring the other rather than diffusing the situation. Each party actually becomes more polarized, retreating to their position while devaluing the other. In this highly emotional state it

becomes impossible for either party to recognize the merit of the other side's position and the other party is eventually seen as the enemy (Fisher and Shapiro 2005, 146; Linder 2006, 274; Robinson 1995, 189).

Dysfunctional communication patterns and the growing perception of the other as the enemy make empathy extremely difficult. While empathy appears to be a simple thing to achieve, holding multiple perspectives and respecting opposing viewpoints is challenging under any conditions. It is exceedingly more difficult once the parties become emotionally involved and view the other as an enemy (Fisher-Yoshida and Wasserman 2006, 564; Robinson 1995, 188- 189).

All of this is compounded if the parties begin to view the conflict as moral one because once a conflict is perceived as an issue of morality, positions become more central to parties' identities, and it becomes increasingly difficult for parties to make concessions. Under these conditions, trust, effective communication, and recognition of positive goal interdependence are nonexistent. This makes it increasingly difficult for either side to appreciate the other's perspective much less compromise or negotiate because any concession constitutes betraying the group's norms and morals. Viewing the other as the enemy and believing any concession is a betrayal of the group, it is impossible to recognize any positive goal interdependence or rational for cooperation (Fisher-Yoshida and Wasserman 2006, 546; Robinson 1995, 188- 189). Significant changes to the relationship must occur before either side is capable of cooperating towards integrative solutions (Deutsch 2006a, 35-40; Lewicki, Saunders, and Minton 2001, 106-8).

Once the other party is seen as a diabolical enemy, inhibitions are lowered and increasingly contentious and possibly violent behavior and tactics are condoned and later expected by the group. Blame and fear can both exacerbate this trend and lead to an escalation in hostile behavior. Blame has this effect because it is accompanied by an obligation to punish wrongdoers. This leads to the formation of hostile goals and deliberate attempts to harm the other and their interests. Fear, on the other hand, justifies increasingly hostile behaviors as a defensive measure from future threat. Hostile acts are seen as necessary pre-emptive strikes to limit the other's ability to do harm (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 103-104, 109).

As this agitated state continues, the conflict begins to escalate. Through a reciprocal process of increasingly contentious and violent tactics, the relationship undergoes a transformation. Parties become increasingly anchored in their beliefs about the other, often exaggerating the extremism of their positions (Robinson 1995, 188-189). At the group level, more militant members assume formal and informal leadership roles, advocating extreme measures and limiting alternate perspectives in the group (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 113). The longer the group is in this state, the more resources they are required to expend. To justify this mounting cost, the conflict becomes increasingly central to their identity, making cooperation difficult. Eventually if the relationship remains in this dysfunctional state, the other is blamed for all that goes wrong. This increases the urge for vengeance and provides the justification to use increasingly violent measures to achieve objectives.

## Deindividualization and Dehumanization

One of the most damaging processes that occur as a conflict escalates is the dehumanization and deindividualization of the other. Dehumanization at its most basic level is the belief that another is less than human.<sup>10</sup> It occurs when strong negative perceptions of others progress past the point of viewing them as less than equal and extends to actually perceiving them to have fallen outside of one's moral community. When this occurs the dehumanized individual or group is no longer entitled to the protections provided by the norms of standard human interaction and levels of aggression and violence outside the standard range for human treatment are tolerated (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 111). Death- row inmates are examples of individuals who society perceives fall outside the greater moral community. Their transgressions against societies are deemed so great that even though they are not a threat to society while incarcerated they are no longer entitled to the fundamental human right of life.

Deindividualization, a related psychological process, occurs when individuals in a group are no longer seen as unique. Instead, personal differences are ignored and all members of the opposition are perceived to personify the negative characteristics of that group (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 112). U.S. perceptions of citizens from Soviet bloc countries during the Cold War are an excellent example of this. They were all viewed as “communists” or “Soviets.” While this may have been an accurate description in some

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<sup>10</sup>The use of the term pig to refer to Police is a clear example of dehumanization. A personal example from Iraq is observing Soldiers transition from using Imshi, to walk away in Arabic, to Ishtar, reserved for animals, when speaking to locals. This change in language does not necessarily indicate the complete dehumanization of the other, but it is a warning sign for leaders to watch.

cases, it was not in all. Additionally, those were not simple descriptive terms during that time period. They were pejorative, loaded with negative connotation.

Thus, through the reinforcing processes of deindividualization and dehumanization, increasingly violent and contentious behavior is deemed acceptable. The target of the behavior has fallen outside the scope for normal human treatment and is no longer entitled to the protections cultural norms for human interaction provide. First by stripping people of their individuality and then by characterizing their assigned group as threats, violent and cruel behavior is not only tolerated, it becomes the most responsible option (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 111-112).

The formation of negative perceptions of the other and specifically the psychological processes of dehumanization and deindividualization play a critical role in conflict escalation. Analysis of various armed violent conflicts indicates that conflicts generally escalate at a gradual incremental rate until they reach a tipping point, where the escalation becomes exponential (Coleman 2006a, 328). The transition between the devaluation and dehumanization of the other is a likely cause for this rapid escalation.

In standard escalation cycles, the existence of strong negative emotions between parties can incrementally increase the intensity of the conflict. Their existence results in the transitory effects of these emotions to outlast the original issue and become more permanent, leading to a stable pattern of dysfunctional and antagonistic interaction. This gradual progression often culminates with the dehumanization and deindividualization of each party and a catastrophic increase in violence (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 111-112; Coleman 2006a, 328-330).

## Sources of Emotion and Current Conflicts

Based on the demonstrated negative effects that emotions have on conflict dynamics, the apparent trend of current conflict's increasing emotionality is troubling. Especially troubling for the U.S. military is the prominent role religion has in the current conflict narratives and the potential for intrastate conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is troubling because research has shown that both tend to be intensely emotional and protracted in nature (Vallacher et al. n.d., 26-32; Lederach 2004, 17-18).

### Religion and Emotion

Religious conflicts tend to be highly emotional and resistant to resolution because the issues at stake are central to a person's or group's core beliefs and how they define themselves. Religious beliefs are often the core of a group's worldview and sense of morality, providing coherence and cosmological truth to their narrative. Questioning or disputing these beliefs is likely to trigger a violent defensive response. Additionally, religions frequently portray the world as a struggle between good and evil or right and wrong. Therefore, religious struggles frequently result in the perception that those that disagree with or hold inconsistent beliefs are evil or inferior.

This is exacerbated by the fact that religious faiths commonly align with other ethnic or cultural identity groups. The increased coherence between other identity group memberships and religious beliefs can significantly enhance in-group solidarity. While this has positive effects inside the given community, it heightens awareness of out-group distinctions. This in isolation is not necessarily bad, but when it is coupled with feelings that the out-group is inferior or evil, it heightens these negative feelings and stimulates conflict (Coleman in press, 27; Fischer 1990, 94-95).

As a result of these dynamics there is generally very little room for concessions in a religiously framed conflict. If concessions in a standard moral conflict are viewed as endangering group norms and interests, religiously motivated groups view concessions in a religious conflict as threats to their immortal souls and affronts to their god. When a conflict is framed like this, it is not surprising that it is fiercely contested and resists resolution efforts. It is also not surprising that many leaders attempt to exploit the conflict stimulating aspects of religion and encourage followers to engage in behavior that is counter to its core teachings (Vallacher et al. n.d., 27).

To counteract religion's conflict stimulating effects, the military needs to emphasize religion's more benign characteristics. While religion is associated with many of the violent and persistent conflicts in the world today, it does have significant conflict limiting characteristics. As one of, if not, the primary community mechanism for moral socialization, religions normally transmit moral standards and norms from one generation to the next and generally profess tolerance, self-restraint and care for others. All of these values are inconsistent with violence and contentious behavior. Efforts designed to emphasize these principles of human interaction may have significant limiting effect on violent armed conflict if properly directed (Vallacher et al. n.d., 26-27).

### Intra-State Conflicts and Emotion

Because people from the same locale frequently engage in the conflict on different sides intra-national conflicts tend to be especially violent and emotional. The close proximity of belligerents and intimate knowledge of each other make the conflict more personal than traditional international conflicts (Lederach 2004, 17-18). Unlike traditional post conflict environments, where belligerents are separated returning to pre-

conflict positions, combatants in intrastate wars frequently return to their homes and communities alongside former belligerents. Denying combatants space to cool the passions enflamed by combat causes ill-feelings that precipitated the conflict to fester with new real or perceived injustices further justifying negative perceptions (Wessels 2004, 80; Lederach 2004, 17-18).

Intrastate conflict dynamics also significantly impact the societies where they are waged. In addition to neighbors frequently engaging in combat, villages and other population centers are normally the battlefields. Civilian populations and the infrastructure they rely on are frequent targets of military operations. Therefore, entire societies share the psychological and emotional wounds of war (Wessels 2004, 80). This significantly increases the conflict's scope and impact. Entire populations become stakeholders in the conflict and are socialized into the violence it represents. The conflict begins to pervade every aspect of society and daily life. It is passed from generation to the next as part of their identity narrative. The conflict becomes an essential part of how they define themselves and others. Because of the conflict's pervasive effect, reconciliation, healing, and peace building efforts need to target entire populations (Wessells 2004, 93-4).

This is how a relatively simple dispute can devolve overtime into seemingly irresolvable conflict of irreconcilable differences that may persist for generations. The temporary behavioral effects of strong negative emotions result in negative perceptions and attitudes. As a result, conflicts that once centered on substantive issues become increasingly relational in nature. Repeated negative interactions result in stable patterns of contentious and antagonistic behavior, which over time become part of a group's

identity narrative. Even if the original issue is resolved, the conflict persists, becoming increasingly difficult to resolve (Coleman et al. n.d., 3).

### Implications

Traditional statist approaches lack the concepts and methods to effectively resolve these conflicts. Their near exclusive focus on substantive issues and reliance on formal state actors is inappropriate in highly emotional intrastate conflicts (Lederach 2004, 18). Their attempts at resolution frequently fail because even if they resolve the substantive issues the conflict persists. Peace treaties signed by official parties can rarely restrain the underlying emotions in the conflict because they often do not truly represent the people or are too abstract to effectively cool emotions. As a result, violence reemerges at the local level and spreads from one locale to the next, sabotaging the formal peace process. To increase the effectiveness of peace efforts, the emotional and relational aspects of conflict must be addressed (Wessels 2004, 80).

The observed effects of highly emotional conflict also calls into question the effectiveness of the traditional military strategies of annihilation, exhaustion, and attrition. Because the preponderance of U.S. military thought is premised on the belief that, through some combination of these three strategies, the military can impose its will on the enemy, this possibility is troubling. These strategies are predicated on the enemy having a lower threshold for discomfort, pain, and suffering than the opposing military is able and willing to inflict. The decisiveness of victory, number of casualties inflicted, and destruction of infrastructure or economic capacity required to compel an enemy to submit is significantly greater in a highly emotional conflict, especially if they perceive it to be a moral one where capitulation is viewed as a threat to the group's religious or cultural

identity. The enemy's willingness to resist may outpace even the U.S. military's unmatched competitive advantage and willingness to commit the resources required to secure victory. Therefore, military power may be sufficient to temporarily suppress emotional conflict, but is likely limited in its ability to effectively resolve it. Once the power is removed, conflict resurfaces (Coleman et al. 2007, 6).

In recent years the military has become increasingly cognizant of this and has focused its efforts on addressing the root causes of armed conflicts. These efforts have largely been directed at resolving substantive issues and only indirectly address sources of negative emotions and relational issues. From the human relations perspective, the emotional and relational issues must be addressed prior to any meaningful resolution.

### Persistent or Intractable Conflict

#### Introduction

The term persistent conflict has become increasingly popular in military circles. FM 3-0, the 2008 Army Posture Statement, and numerous speeches by high ranking defense officials use the phrase “era of persistent conflict” to describe the current operational environment. They define it as “period(s) of protracted confrontation among states, non-state, and individual actors increasingly willing to use violence to achieve their political and ideological ends” (Casey 2007; Department of Army 2008a, 2; Department of Army 2008b, foreword). Conflicts that persist for long periods are not new. In fact, many current conflicts have roots that date back hundreds of years with primary stakeholders that were not born when the conflict began. Northern Ireland, Kashmir, Palestine, and Cyprus are areas where conflict has been passed from one generation to the next. The current conflict in Cyprus, for example, dates back to

Byzantine and Ottoman struggles for control of the Anatolia peninsula and Constantinople. It predates both of the modern states, Turkey and Greece (Coleman 2003, 4).

Their lack of novelty should not minimize the severity of the problem persistent conflicts represent, however. A recent analysis of armed conflict provides disturbing data. Around forty percent of current intrastate conflicts have persisted for at least ten years and twenty-five percent of them have endured for twenty-five years or more. More troubling is that ten of the twelve most severe international conflicts have roots in enduring rivalries (Coleman 2003, 4). This has serious implications for the military and warrants significant efforts to increase understanding of intractable conflict's dynamics to better inform interventions.

### Intractable Conflicts

Intractable conflicts are protracted in nature, destructive, and resist resolution attempts.<sup>11</sup> They persist for long periods of time, appear to be irresolvable, and frequently involve important issues of identity, religion, high-stake resources, and survival. Conflicts are rarely intractable in the beginning, only becoming so after negative perceptions, trauma, and other factors fundamentally alter the conflict's underlying dynamics (Coleman 2003, 5-6).

While every conflict is unique, an analysis of intractable conflicts reveals some common characteristics that distinguish them from more manageable disputes. Emerging

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<sup>11</sup>This definition is only slightly different than the Army's accepted definition for persistent conflict, but the distinction is an important one. By explicitly stating that they resist resolution, this definition prepares parties for the arduous challenge ahead and increases their resiliency.

from real or perceived incompatibilities of interests, ranging from unequal access to resource to cultural differences, intractable conflicts demonstrate similarities with respect to context, issues, relations, processes, and outcomes (Coleman 2006b, 534).

Understanding their characteristics with respect to these domains may provide insight into their formation, maintenance, and ultimately their resolution.

### Context

Intractable conflicts frequently emerge and are maintained in areas where there are histories of oppression and dominance and significant instability. The existence of power imbalances in relationships enables one group to exploit another, using power to garner more than their fair share of resources and power. Frequently, in-group and out-group distinctions are drawn with access to valuable resources and power closely tied to these group memberships. At the state level, high power groups often attempt to solidify their temporary privileged status by manipulating the system. By instituting controls that ensure their continued superior access to jobs, education, and support, high power groups make their dominance more permanent. This results in distributive injustice and structural oppression of low power groups (Deutsch 2006b, 11-12; Coleman 2003, 11-12).

Periods of rapid and substantial change are often associated with the emergence of intractable conflict. In areas of chronic instability, there are frequent shifts in the balance of power. This can lead to significant changes in standards of living for groups, which may engender feelings of relative deprivation. Using the recently elevated status of others or their previously attained standard of living as the comparison group, the current state fails to meet expectations. The shift in relative power does not even have to be real to have an effect. Simply creating the perception or possibility of potential shifts in power

can foster elevated expectations and aspirations, which also heighten feelings of relative deprivation and may stimulate conflict (Coleman 2006b, 535). Chaotic environments can also lead to the breakdown of personal and social trust. The “might makes right” mentality that emerges when conditions approach anarchy erodes feelings of personal trust between individuals, while the dissolution of public institutions and breakdown of societal norms degrades social or institutional trust. Without trust there is little hope for resolution (Lewicki 2006, 93, 110-11; Deutsch 1973, 55).

### Issues

Intractable conflicts frequently emerge from a complex combination of interrelated issues including core values, religion, scarce resources, and relative power. The centrality of these issues to a group’s identity and their implications for the group’s collective security combined with zero-sum thinking often result in the perception that there is little room for compromise or cooperation on issues (Coleman 2006b, 534).

Additionally, the transformation from general to specific leads to an intricate interconnectedness of issues that makes decoupling them into more manageable pieces difficult (Robinson 1995, 194; Pruitt and Kim 2004, 106; Coleman 2006b, 537). This coupled with the perception of a fundamental incompatibility of interests between parties leads to intractability. Parties, therefore, believe that the issues are irresolvable, minimizing the probability of successful intervention.

### Relationships

Relationships in intractable conflicts are obviously strained and frequently antagonistic. The real or perceived direct relationship between group memberships and

access to resources facilitates the transition of conflicts from being about resources to becoming increasingly relational in nature (Fisher 2006, 179-80). Eventually, the conflict narrative becomes an essential part of each group's socialization process. Low power groups focus on stories of victimization and injustice, while high power groups attribute differences in access to effort and talent. This is exacerbated by the breakdown of trust caused by the unstable context of the relationship (Coleman 2006b, 538). Overtime, opposition to the other group becomes an important part of group identity with parties becoming deeply invested in their polarized identities (Fisher 2006, 178).

The antagonistic nature of the relationship leads to a lack of interaction between parties that reduces social contact and facilitates the exaggeration of the other. This would not necessarily be bad if the parties were capable of effectively avoiding each other, but in most intractable conflicts contact is inescapable (Coleman 2006b, 538). Parties frequently live, work, and recreate in close proximity to each other. This could possibly have a conflict limiting effect, but because of social stratifications, social and professional interaction is superficial and normally reinforces group stereotypes rather than breaking them down.<sup>12</sup>

### Process

Strong negative emotions significantly affect the cognitive functioning and behavior of parties in conflict. The transitive emotions of fear, anger, and blame limit perceptions and cause rash behavior. Overtime these transitory effects can become

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<sup>12</sup>Relations during segregation in the United States are excellent examples. Contact between races was common, but the lack of meaningful interaction allowed negative stereotypes and unequal treatment to continue.

enduring as parties form negative perceptions and attitudes of the other. The reciprocation of contentious behavior initiates an escalation cycle that culminates with the formation of hostile goals and the dehumanization of the other. This process degrades communication, reduces empathy, and often leads to violent behavior and atrocities (Coleman 2006b, 539-540).

Because of the deeply rooted nature of these conflicts they often have a pervasive quality, permeating every aspect of the individual's life. Dealing with issues of identity, they affect entire populations or groups, regardless of direct involvement. Overtime, they become interwoven into the fabric of society, subtly influencing the arts, education, and worldviews (Coleman 2006b, 540).<sup>13</sup> They also frequently cut across different levels of the society and attract external parties. Each new party brings personal perspectives and interests that increase the conflict's complexity.

### Outcomes

Armed conflicts are violent, nasty, and traumatic. It exposes those in the combat zone to death and destruction in prodigious quantities. More savage conflicts combine the usual death and destruction with rape, mutilations, and acts of humiliation. This is tremendously traumatic for victims, perpetrators, and witnesses alike. Protracted trauma can have a profound impact on individuals and groups, damaging their spirit and inducing a host of physiological and psychological health issues. Without adequate coping mechanisms, afflicted individuals struggle to complete daily activities. They frequently are sick, withdrawn, lethargic, and overwhelmed with a sense of hopelessness and apathy.

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<sup>13</sup>A review of the Cold War's impact on American culture illustrates this nicely

Prolonged exposure to warfare and conflict can desensitize groups. Violence becomes normalized and is no longer seen as unacceptable. When societal restraints are removed from the use of force, violence frequently becomes the default mechanism for achieving objectives, securing resources, and resolving disputes. This type of behavior has an obvious conflict stimulating effect.

While each of these basic characteristics was discussed individually, it is important to recognize that intractable conflicts are exceedingly complex systems. The system is highly interdependent, characterized by multidirectional and non-linear influences between variables that reinforce each other. As such, they are dynamic and a change in one element does not result in a proportional adjustment in others. This makes them especially difficult to predict or shape.

Recently, however, a new approach to conflict resolution has emerged that demonstrates potential for increasing understanding of the conditions that lead to intractable conflicts and may assist in the development of strategies to successfully resolve them. It provides new insights into their nature, elucidates the factors that lead to their formation and maintenance, and provides new ideas for intervention and resolution. Areas of particular relevance to military operations and intervention efforts are the attractor model, collapsing multidimensionality, and imbalanced feedback loops.

### Dynamical Systems Approach

Multiple academic fields are increasingly using dynamical systems theory (DST) to explain and better understand the dynamics of complex systems. In basic terms, dynamical systems are a collection of interdependent elements that evolve overtime (Coleman et al. 2007, 4). The dynamical systems approach to conflict views conflicts as a

destructive pattern of interaction caused by multiple different variables, cognitions, attitudes, and actions, all influenced by context, issues, relationships, and processes, which interact over time gravitating towards a general state of negativity (Coleman, Bui-Wrzosnska, and Vallacher 2006, 62). The systems are both dynamic and complex with the influence between elements being bi-directional and nonlinear.

Closely examining this definition allows the reader to glean some of the basic assumptions this approach operates under. Each one of these assumptions provides insights into why intractable conflicts are protracted in nature and resist resolution. Understanding them is the necessary first step for developing analysis tools, models and intervention strategies.

Intractable conflicts are inherently complex. Their dynamics are determined by a complex interaction of internal and external variables whose influence is multidirectional and non-linear (Coleman et al. 2006, 62). The multidirectional nature of this influence implies that each system variable influences and is influenced by the others simultaneously, while their nonlinear nature causes a change in one element to not result in a proportional change in other variables. The multidirectional and nonlinear nature of the system means that any change to an individual element may result in an infinite number of possible outcomes. This makes prediction difficult, limited to anticipating general shifts in the system not specific outcomes (Coleman 2006a, 327).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>This is consistent with the military's experience and frustration with effects based operations (Mattis 2008, 1). Rather than moving away from effects based operations completely, however, the military might consider readjusting expectations and using effects based operations to predict general shifts in the system not specific outcomes.

Intractable conflicts are inherently dynamic. The entire system constantly evolves, experiencing escalatory and de-escalatory periods, changing stakeholders, alternating saliency of key issues, and passing between levels of the system (Coleman et al. 2006, 63). This makes analysis and resolution difficult because while the conflict may have had one discrete cause initially, the complex and constant interaction of variables results in the system evolving overtime, altering the dynamics of the system and perpetuating the conflict (Coleman et al. 2007, 4). Therefore, resolving the original issue, may have a brief transitory effect, but may not substantially adjust the destructive pattern of behavior (Coleman et al. n.d., 3).

Amidst their inherent turbulence, a general state of negativity emerges. Stable patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior emerge overtime as perceptual biases and social dynamics lead to framing, anchoring, and invidious comparisons that maintain negative perceptions. Because of this general stability in spite of constant change, the system resists intervention attempts, especially those that target one aspect of the system.

### Intractable Conflicts as Attractors

This general stability in the midst of turbulent change led to the conceptualization of intractable conflict as an attractor where the general negativity of cognitions, emotions, and interactions represents a status quo or conflict landscape that the system tries to maintain (Coleman 2006a, 335). The attractor represents an equilibrium or reliable pattern a dynamical system consistently returns to after temporary perturbations. Attractors effectively channel a group's behavior and cognitions into a narrow range of options, making their patterns stable overtime in spite of varied situations (Coleman et al. 2007, 4-5). A system without attractors can assume a variety of states based on external

influences, but once attractors are present the system attempts to maintain coherency and resists change (Vallacher et al. n.d., 9).

The metaphor of a ball on an undulating landscape is a useful model for understanding the attractor concept (see figure 3). The ball represents the current state of the system and depressions represent attractors in the system where the ball will naturally rest in the absence of external pressure (Coleman et al. 2007, 5). Basins of attraction vary in two primary respects, their width and depth. The width of the basin determines the number of states that gravitate towards the attractor. The greater the width is the greater the number of ideas and events that evolve towards existing negative views and perceptions about another person or group. In cases of highly intractable conflict, the width can extend to the point that objectively positive information or events are perceived negatively and actually reinforce the conflict (Vallacher et al. n.d., 11). The depth of the basin represents the relative strength of the attractor. The deeper the basin is the stronger the attractor and the greater the effort required to adjust malignant thoughts and behaviors (Coleman et al. 2006, 69).

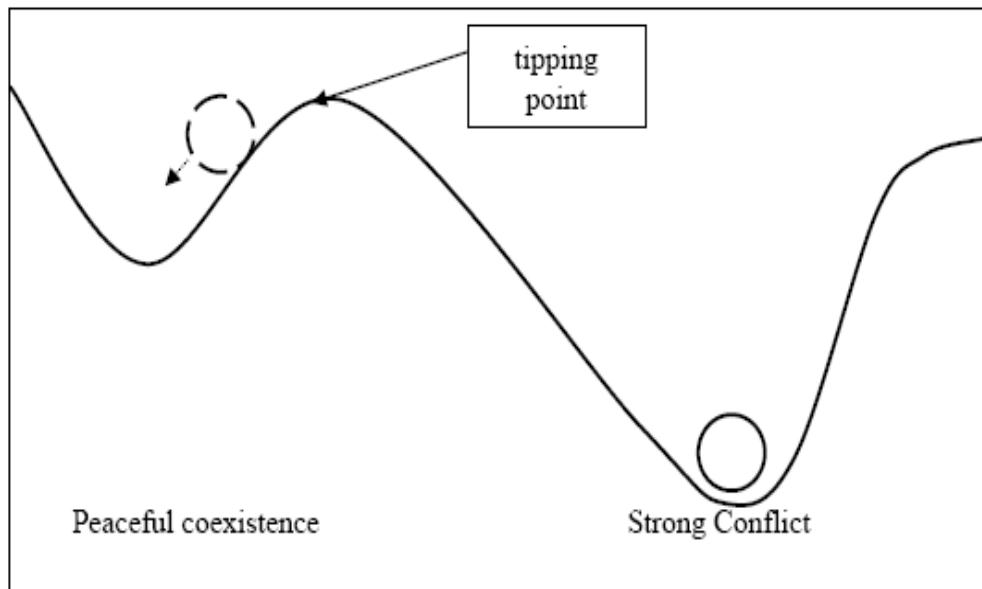


Figure 3. A Dynamical System with Two Attractors (A and B)

Source: P. T. Coleman, "Intractable Conflict as an Attractor: Presenting a Dynamical Model of Conflict, Escalation, and Intractability," *American Behavioral Scientist* 50, no. 1, 6.

It is important to recognize that the model has two basins of attraction one for positivity and one negativity. This implies that every system has the potential to develop both positive and negative attractors. Clearly, in any long term complex relationship there are mixed experiences, positive and negative. Positive experiences are frequently discounted as anomalies, attributed to other causes, ignored, or reframed negatively in contentious relationships. Overtime, however, they can form latent attractors, which represent unexpressed potential states depicted as the unoccupied attractor basin. Because this basin could capture the dynamics of the system, the basic goal of traditional interventions is to move the current state of the system from the basin of negativity to the

positive one, making it the active attractor. This would result in a stable pattern of positivity (Coleman et al. 2007, 5).

Regrettably, intractable conflict's negative attractor basins are significantly wider and deeper than their positive ones. Because they are the product of the complex interaction of interrelated elements the perturbation of a single domain rarely leads to lasting changes. More likely, efforts to adjust the current state of the system will move the current state, or ball, partially up the negativity basin, but fail to successfully move it over the top where it might descend into the positive basin. Once the pressure is removed the ball will return to the basin's bottom. Additionally, if the ball does temporarily rest in the positive basin, it will likely not remain there long. The positive basin's relative shallowness and narrowness increase the chance that future information and events will wrest the ball back, returning it to the wider and deeper negative basin. Therefore, the DST approach not only focuses on adjusting the current state of the system, but also on altering the attractor landscape by reducing negative and building positive attractors. To effectively do this, it is important to understand attractor formation.

### Attractor Formation

The dynamical systems frame suggests that interrelated psychological and social processes generate attractors and foster intractability (Coleman 2006, 335). As conflicts escalate, there is a qualitative shift in the relationship where intense emotions sustained overtime result in negative perceptions and attitudes that lower inhibitions and stimulate contentious behavior. These related processes can result in a loss of balanced feedback and a collapse in multidimensionality (Coleman et al. 2006, 63-4). When feedback mechanisms become severely imbalanced, all feedback mechanisms stimulating conflict

with none restraining it, a strong attractor emerges and the potential exists for an exponential escalation in the conflict and intractability.

### Feedback Loops

Effective behavior regulation requires balanced positive and negative feedback mechanisms. The same is true of conflict regulation or control. The positivity or negativity of a feedback loop does not imply valence. It refers to whether the feedback reinforces or inhibits the initial valence. Positive feedback mechanisms stimulate feelings or behaviors along their current path or trajectory often increasing their intensity. Negative feedback mechanisms do the opposite, providing a restraining force and preventing further escalation. In intractable conflicts, feedback loops become imbalanced.

### Collapsing Multidimensionality and Positive Feedback Loops

In normal functional situations, parties generally recognize a certain level of complexity in their relationships. They perceive them to be layered and multidimensional, consisting of multiple issues of differing importance and valence. This recognized multidimensionality mitigates highly escalated contentious feelings and actions because while there are aspects of the other they perceive negatively, there are some they view as ambiguous and positive (Coleman et al. 2006, 65).

Collapsing multidimensionality, however, causes the positive alignment of beliefs, attitudes and feelings with group memberships so they begin to reinforce each other, creating a positive feedback loop. Us versus them conflict frames develop and perceptions of the other begin to revolve around the identity group most salient in the conflict. Opposition group members are deindividuated, stimulating the conflict as

positive feedback loops trigger and reinforce one another (Coleman 2006, 335; Coleman et al. 2006, 65). In intense conflicts, members of the other party are not seen as parents, teachers, or music lovers even if these descriptions are accurate. All group memberships cease mattering except the one in conflict. Frequently this occurs on both sides, each seeing the other and themselves in these terms. This extreme coherence of identity leads to significant increase in positive feedback and becomes one of the primary obstacles to resolution (Coleman and Lowe 2007, 382).

The effect of this interconnectedness and alignment of thoughts and actions on intractability is not limited to domains, but also impacts across levels of the conflict (Coleman et al. 2007, 11). Consistent with the intergroup perspective of group dynamics, DST asserts activities at one level of social reality influence others. In other words, conflict at one level of social reality promotes and maintains attractors at others.

For example, many militant groups espouse that there is a fundamental incompatibility between Islam and the West, claiming the West is bent on destroying their way of life.<sup>15</sup> This provides the perception of an overarching conflict at the intergroup level. This perception prevents many from both sides from adjusting their attitudes about the other despite positive interactions at the individual and group level. Conversely, individual acts, like those committed in Abu Ghraib, can counteract positive momentum at the group level and cause a return to the negative stability (Coleman et al. 2007, 11-12). This process can occur in reverse with joint influence across levels resulting in positive change, but because of the greater strength of negative attractors in

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<sup>15</sup>Fundamental Islam is not the only group advancing this claim. Samuel Huntington argues the same in his classic work *The Clash of Civilizations*.

intractable conflicts it rarely does. Thus, it typically stimulates escalation or resists amelioration of the conflict at other levels, but rarely diminishes it. Thus, the combined effects of the embedded nature of social realities and generalization of issues cause different levels to reinforce one another and resist change that targets only one level (Coleman 2006, 329). Progress on any level will likely result in a temporary shift away from the attractor, but not lasting change if it is not reinforced on other levels.

### Reduction of Negative Feedback Loops

In social situations, cultural and societal norms exert significant influence on thoughts, feelings and behavior causing parties to conform to socially constructed standards of conduct. Under normal conditions these standards of behavior operate as negative feedback mechanisms, preventing thoughts and actions from escalating to a Clausewitzian extreme. For example, in an argument over the morning paper, resorting to violence to secure the last copy is not a socially acceptable recourse. In emotional situations, these negative feedback mechanisms can be overridden, resulting in a rash act divergent from accepted norms of behavior. Once the individual has had time to cool emotionally, they normally recognize the unacceptability of their behavior and feel remorse.

In protracted conflicts, these negative feedback mechanisms breakdown. Strong emotions lead to negative perceptions and attitudes about the other. This often results in stereotyping, discrimination, and intense affect at the individual and groupthink and deindividuation at the group level (Coleman et al. n.d., 10-11). Both at the individual and group level, these processes reduce negative feedback mechanisms by creating the perception that the other party deserves ill treatment as punishment for previous

offensives. In extreme cases, this process culminates in dehumanization where the other party is no longer entitled to the protections provided by the norms of standard human interaction. This reduces inhibitions and leads to increasingly antagonistic interactions.

### Resolution Efforts

In light of the stability intractable conflicts demonstrate, dynamical system thinking focuses not only on issues and relationships, but also the conflict landscape (Coleman et al. 2006, 69). The transformational movement in mediation has convincingly argued that resolving issues in contention without addressing the relationship will result in temporary amelioration of the conflict, but not in sustainable resolution (Bush and Folger 1995, 37). The dynamical systems approach takes this argument to the necessary next step. No resolution of issues or relationship transformation will be lasting if the environment or landscape is not altered to support it (Coleman et al. 2007, 14).<sup>16</sup> By providing new insights into intractable conflict formation and maintenance, DST provides fresh perspectives on resolution opportunities and alternatives (Coleman et al. 2006, 15).

Borrowing from the principles of Gestalt, the dynamical systems frame rejects the notion that intractable conflicts have one cause. Because focusing exclusively on issues or repairing the relationship is not sufficient, it recommends a more holistic approach to conflict intervention. Resolving intractable conflicts requires fundamentally altering the

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<sup>16</sup>Leadership development research has also demonstrated that behavior modification is not sustainable unless the organizational landscape or culture is compatible (Avolio 1999, 130).

conflict landscape by disassembling malignant attractors and promoting positive ones (Coleman et al. n.d., 9-10).

### Restoring Complexity

#### Negative Attractor Deconstruction

Because of its central role in attractor formation and feedback loop imbalance, intervention efforts should start with restoring a perception of complexity to the system. As conflicts persist and escalate, parties begin to perceive that opposition groups have fundamentally incompatible interests and are unified and homogenous groups. In reality, relationships are almost always complex and multifaceted; consisting of multiple issues of varying interdependence, importance, and intractability. Additionally, even the most homogeneous group is not completely consistent in thought and perception. Because each group member possesses multiple group memberships and identities, there is normally significant unexpressed variance in commitment to group attitudes, norms, and strategies.

These realities, contrary to the prevailing perceptions of both parties, provide potential opportunities for reintroducing multidimensionality to the conflict. Breaking down larger issues into more manageable pieces, for example, can assist in restoring issue complexity, demonstrating areas for potential cooperation and disabusing parties of the belief that groups are fundamentally incompatible (Coleman et al. 2006, 71). It has the added benefit of reducing the sense of inevitability and pessimism that surround these conflicts, potentially creating momentum. It may even identify supra-ordinate goals that transcend the conflict and provide a rationale for cooperation that is inconsistent with a simplified assumption of incompatibility (Coleman et al. n.d., 35).

In addition to increasing issue complexity, establishing positive goal interdependence increases awareness of relationship multidimensionality. Sharing a common interest with another group makes it difficult to hold universally negative perceptions of them. This inability to hold universally negative perceptions reduces positive feedback loops. Other methods of restoring complexity to the relationship and reducing positive feedback loops are highlighting positive examples of specific out-group members and finding influential in-group members who do not share the prevalent group perceptions. If these individuals are charismatic enough, discounting or marginalizing them will be difficult. These efforts can create sufficient cognitive dissonance to cause people and groups to reevaluate their perceptions and world view (Coleman et al. 2007, 15).

It may also be possible to fragment the out-group into two subgroups with negative attributes associated with only one of the subgroups. This prevents groups from generalizing negative perceptions and attitudes across entire populations with one subgroup serving as the container for all negative feelings (Coleman et al. 2006, 72). The U.S. military's deliberate efforts to separate the average Iraqi and Afghani citizen from insurgent activities is a clear example of this type of positive feedback reduction. This type of strategy might be especially successful if all parties are able to effectively distance themselves from the container group. The Ba'ath party may have and might still play a similar role in Sunni and Shia reconciliation.

All of these complexity creating measures also reduce negative feedback loops indirectly. By elevating the perceptions of the out-group, it becomes increasingly difficult to deindividualize and dehumanize them. As a result, they are no longer morally excluded

from standards for human treatment. Once again belonging to the moral scope, they are entitled to the same protections cultural norms provide for in-group members (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 111). These cultural norms exert a conflict limiting effect and serve as a negative feedback loop, potentially engaging prior to conflict reaching a highly violent or contentious state (Coleman et al. 2007, 11).

### Positive Attractor Formation

The concept of latent attractors, depicted by the unoccupied basin of positivity in the attractor model (see figure 2), provides an additional opportunity for resolution efforts. The idea that a positive attractor exists and can capture the dynamics of the conflict or relationship if it is dislodged from the basin of negativity highlights the importance of identifying and reinforcing latent positive attractors (Coleman et al. n.d., 30). The construction of positive attractors is often unobservable initially, only becoming perceptible when the system shifts dominant or active attractors (Coleman et al. n.d., 34). This change in attractors normally results in a sudden qualitative shift in the relationship rather than a gradual incremental one.

This does not imply that previous efforts to build positive attractors were ineffective. It simply demonstrates the complexity and nonlinearity of the system (Coleman et al. 2007, 18). Previous efforts widened and deepened the positive basin of attraction, allowing it to more easily and securely capture the system's dynamics when conditions cause the current state to overcome its inertia and cross between the negative and positive basins. Without sufficiently strengthening the positive attractor in advance there is a high probability that the first disconfirming thought or event after a conflict

shift will wrest the system's dynamics back to a state of negativity (Coleman et al. 2007, 16-17).

An excellent example of the subtle development of positive attractors is highlighted in a story told by a soldier who served in Iraq in 2006. His patrol was attacked by insurgents while delivering medical supplies to the local community. After capturing the insurgents and questioning bystanders, the patrol continued on the original mission to demonstrate their commitment to the local's welfare. Because the basin of negativity was so wide, the decision to deliver the supplies after the attack was described by a local leader as a contemptible sign of U.S. weakness. When questioned six months later about this event, the same leader claimed it was one of the most cited examples of positive U.S. intentions. This story illustrates two points. One, that an especially wide basin of negativity can frame ambiguous and even positive acts to reinforce the existing conflict dynamic. Two, actions that were initially framed negatively can create latent positive attractors that assist in capturing and maintaining the conflict's dynamics after some other event has pushed it out of the negative basin.

Because of their role in creating and maintaining intractability, DST approach posits that interventions should focus on reducing negative and creating positive attractors by increasing complexity and rebalancing feedback loops in the system. This will assist in creating ripeness for transformation, reduce the strength required to move the system out of the negative attractor, and increase the probability it will settle in a positive attractor by fundamentally altering the conflict's landscape. In this way, the dynamical systems approach establishes the conditions for, initiates, and creates an environment to maintain change (Coleman 2006, 340). This differs from traditional

methods that focus exclusively on shifting the current state of the system, an adjustment that is normally short lived as stronger and wider negative attractors recapture the system's dynamics.

### Dynamical Systems Theory Analysis

One of the primary strengths of this approach is it highlights the complexity of conflict and social interaction in general. Too many theorists and practitioners are looking for “cookie cutter” or “silver bullet” solutions to complex problems. This approach makes it clear that the solution for each problem is unique. While there may be similarities across conflicts or fundamental principals used, each one needs to be analyzed individually to develop a specific intervention plan. It also can prevent practitioners from oversimplifying the situation and developing simple answers to complex problems that are normally wrong.

Additionally, by stressing the long-term nature of interventions, it allows practitioners to mentally prepare themselves for the long arduous process ahead, insulating them from the despair common when a perceived opportunity does not result in peace. This increases their resilience, which is considered essential for maintaining commitment in the face of setbacks (Coleman and Lowe 2007, 401). The reorientation from outcomes to patterns and trends sustains hope as well. Observing patterns and trends has the added benefit of keeping interveners in tune with the conflict landscape so they can sense changes and potentially reinforce or retard shifts depending on their direction. Most importantly, this approach demonstrates that peace needs to be actively maintained. The existence of latent destructive attractors highlights the potential for resumption of

dysfunctional conflict (Coleman et al. 2007, 18). Progress is too hard fought to be surrendered because of lack of attention or maintenance.

One challenge to the theory's applicability is the difficulty inherent in integrating this expansive, long-term approach. The amount of human, intellectual, and tangible resources required to plan, synchronize, and execute an intervention on this scale is astounding. States and IGOs like the United Nations are frequently the only actors capable of mobilizing these resources. Additionally, the unity of effort required for this level of integration is rarely seen outside of crisis situations. The issue then becomes maintaining the momentum because interest diminishes, consensus fades, willingness to expend resources evaporates, and progress made is surrendered once the crisis is suppressed to a tolerable level.

Attempting to balance the inherent tension between overwhelming complexity and over simplifying a complex system, the authors opted for a model that was conceptually illustrative (personal correspondence with Peter Coleman). While the current model displays the system's cumulative dynamics, it needs to be refined to allow the detailed analysis necessary for targeted interventions. This will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter.

A related weakness of the theory is that while calling for a holistic approach, the current attractor discussion centers almost exclusively on relation and process. Remembering that intractable conflicts differ from more manageable ones in context, issues, relations, process, and outcomes, it might be beneficial to look for attractors across all five of these domains. This too will be addressed in the analysis section chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Recently a host of critics have claimed that the USG's approach to international armed conflict, specifically their military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, are inappropriate for the 21st Century. While most of the criticisms have centered on the government's failure to incorporate lessons from past conflicts into their current operations, an equally legitimate critique is that it has not used existing theory to guide its practice. Therefore, the explicit purpose of this thesis is to explore the validity of these criticisms and identify relevant theory and research to improve the USG's current approach.

The literature review of this paper has three primary focuses, the nature of armed conflict, the role of emotion in conflict, and conflict intractability. The review of armed conflict has three primary areas of inquiry, conflict's general nature, historical trends, and influences on current conflict. The examination of conflict's general nature attempts to discern universal characteristics that transcend situational differences. The goal of conducting a surface review of historical trends is to identify situational variables between time periods that may fundamentally alter or influence the nature of conflict. A more detailed review of post Cold-War conflict establishes the defining characteristics of recent armed disputes. Additionally, it provides insight into likely locations and causes of future war.

Determining that current conflict is more emotional than the ones the U.S. has traditionally prepared, the next section of the literature review explores the effect of emotions on conflict. This examination starts by identifying the transitory effects of

strong negative emotions on behavior and decision-making. It then explores the potential long-term consequences as these emotions influence group perceptions, attitudes, and goals. It concludes with a review of common intervention concepts, tools, and methods for reducing strong negative emotions in conflict.

Based on recent trends the final section of the literature review focuses on persistent conflict. The initial focus is identifying characteristics that lead to intractability and distinguish protracted conflicts from more manageable disputes. The focus then shifts to emerging theory on intractable conflict resolution.

The analysis section of the paper draws on the information from the literature review to answer the secondary research questions outlined in chapter 1 (see table 1) that the preceding review did not adequately address. The analysis will specifically focus on determining the location of future U.S. military involvement and their relative emotionality and intractability. Establishing this, the relative effectiveness of the three conflict paradigms outlined in chapter 1 for analyzing and resolving conflict can be determined.

Table 1. Secondary Research Questions

Secondary Questions	Sub questions
1. Are the conflicts the U.S. will likely engage in the Twenty-first Century significantly different than those it has traditionally prepared?	a. Is there a general nature of armed conflict? b. Where is armed conflict likely to occur in the Twenty-first Century? c. What is the specific nature of these conflicts?
2. Do emotions significantly affect conflict dynamics?	a. How do they affect cognitions and behavior? b. How do negative perceptions affect social interactions in conflict settings?
3. Does conflict intractability affect intervention efforts?	a. What characteristics differ between intractable and more resolvable conflicts?
4. Is the realist approach to conflict appropriate for Twenty-first Century conflict?	
5. Are other paradigms better equipped to address the conflicts the military will face in the future?	
6. Do these perspectives offer new and valuable insights on conflict formation, maintenance, and resolution that could increase effectiveness in current operations?	

*Source:* Created by author.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

There seemed no end to the resources mobilized; all limits disappeared in the vigor and enthusiasm shown by governments and their subjects. Various factors powerfully increased that vigor: the vastness of available resources, the ample field of opportunity, and the depth of feeling generally aroused. The sole aim of war was to overthrow the opponent. Not until he was prostrate was it considered possible to pause and reconcile the opposing interests.

— Carl von Clausewitz

The ultimate purpose of this analysis is to examine the appropriateness of the U.S.' approach to armed conflict. Because of the complex nature of this analysis, it is broken into two primary sections. The first is an examination of the nature of armed conflict. The second is an analysis of three conflict paradigms' relative ability to address the challenges and issues identified in section one.

Mao claimed that to truly understand war one must not only understand the nature of war in general terms, but must recognize the specific nature of the one he is currently engaged and appreciate the effects of its particular characteristics. It is logical to assume that the same is true to effectively resolve armed conflict. Therefore, this portion of the analysis will briefly explore the general nature of armed conflict, but specifically focus on the conflicts the U.S. is currently and will likely engage in the near future. It will attempt to determine the most likely locations for U.S. military intervention and then explore these conflicts' particular nature. Because of their demonstrated effects on conflict dynamics, this analysis specifically explores conflict's relative emotionality and intractability.

The second half of the analysis examines three primary conflict paradigms. It briefly outlines each approach's general characteristic and their relative strengths and

weaknesses. It then explores the appropriateness and effectiveness of each school's theories, concepts, and tools for analyzing and resolving the conflicts identified in section one. This analysis provides the necessary information to answer the primary question posed in the introduction, is the U.S.' current approach to armed conflict appropriate. It also may provide possible alternatives and perspectives to refine the U.S. current approach.

### Nature of Armed Conflict

There is no true and distinct nature of war. Armed conflict as a social construct oscillates between an infinite number of potential states, determined by the complex interaction of multiple factors including issue importance, perceptions of threat, relative power, and a host of other variables. Thus, the nature of war can range from highly emotional unconstrained by reason to hyper-rational utterly subordinated to policy (Clausewitz 1976, 81). Therefore, to draw any meaningful conclusions an analysis of the specific type of conflict is necessary.

### 21st Century Conflict

#### Location

Using Barnett's framework for the international system, the first portion of this analysis attempts to determine whether U.S. military intervention is more likely to occur in the Core or Gap during the 21st Century.<sup>17</sup> Drawing from the literature review, it will

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<sup>17</sup>As discussed in the introduction, this paper does not assert that Twenty-first Century conflict is fundamentally different from past conflict. Recent trends, however, indicate that the U.S. is becoming increasingly involved in conflicts with significantly different natures than the ones it traditionally prepared. When used in this analysis, the

define the Core's and Gap's relevant characteristics and examine their effect on conflict formation. Analyzing the conflict stimulating versus inhibiting dynamics of each region should reveal the relative probability of U.S. military intervention in each area.

### Conflict in the Core

Core countries are generally characterized by high functioning central governments, low crime, and relatively high standards of living (Barnett 2003, 135). These states generally meet their populations' basic and many higher level needs. Their populations are therefore relatively satisfied with the status quo. While there is internal conflict, it is rarely violent more often consisting of marches, rallies, or other forms of peaceful demonstration. They are internally stable with little risk of sustained internal armed conflict.

Core states also have strong central governments that clearly control their foreign policy. There is clearly some variance in the degree of influence that the populace exerts on policy decision, but reason is still the primary determinant in decisions to engage in armed conflict. This results in the Core pursuing limited objectives and subordinating armed conflict to policy.

The overarching international system also has a conflict limiting effect on the Core. Globalization has resulted in significant interdependence across Core countries. Each country's economic well-being is inextricably tied to others through international trade and commerce (Friedman 2000, 133). System stability provides a mutually enticing

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term Twenty-first Century conflict refers to the type of conflict the U.S. will likely engage in during the Twenty-first Century.

opportunity for economic prosperity that effectively inhibits any conflict that threatens this opportunity.

The final conflict inhibitor is the inherent risk of armed conflict. The Cold War demonstrated that despite serious ideological differences and heated rhetoric, the threat of global annihilation effectively curbed appetites for war in both Blocs. Even removing the threat of nuclear weapons, Core states are the privileged in the current international system and have a vested interest in preserving the status quo. War between Core states represents a threat to their current advantaged status and to the system as a whole. Thus, Core states will not only weigh potential gains of armed conflict against the short-term costs of temporarily disrupting the system, but also the risk of losing their advantaged status and destroying the international structures that privileges them. Clearly, the opportunity to elevate their status in the system is an enticement, but the gamble that war represents will limit Core states willingness to militarily engage peers or near peers to actualize it.

Gap states do not share this hesitancy to disrupt the international system. Acutely aware of the inequities it represents and maintains, they often resent and actively attempt to destabilize the international system. Because the system does not empower or officially recognize them in most cases, supranational groups and super-empowered individuals often share this perception and goal (Friedman 2000, 131). This provides Gap countries and some supranational actors with a motivation to conduct attacks in Core states. Their inability to project power and sustain operations, however, limits these attacks in duration and scope. They are not likely to lead to sustained armed conflict in

the Core. More likely, isolated attacks on the Core will lead to invasions of countries that committed these acts or harbor the organizations that did.

### Conflict in the Gap

Gap countries, on the other hand, are typified by high crime, corrupt and inept governments that struggle to meet their population's basic needs, and a generally low standard of living (Barnett 2003, 135). High crime, political instability, and poverty are rampant in these areas of the world. A legitimate scarcity of high stake resources and power imbalances combined with the fact that access to both is often tied to identity group memberships makes them ripe for internal conflict and intrastate war (Kaplan 1994, 88; Lederach 2004, 6).

That many of the identity groups involved in these conflicts are aligned along ethnic, religious, and cultural lines that span international borders frequently causes these conflicts to internationalize (Lederach 2004, 11-12). They are also often associated with large scale humanitarian disasters that push vulnerable populations below the subsistence level. These factors often lead Core states to intervene in these conflicts to stabilize regions, prevent the conflicts further spread, or deliver humanitarian aid to stop large-scale suffering like U.S. operations in Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo did.

Regrettably, entanglement is often the price for third party intervention. Core military forces frequently become active combatants in these conflicts as they attempt to separate parties, enforce peace, and deliver humanitarian aid. Growing awareness of relative deprivation and resentment over foreign intervention can result in local nationals attacking Core forces deployed to assist in building peace and easing suffering. This potentiality makes interventions in the Gap particularly difficult for the Core and

highlights an ongoing underlying conflict between Core and Gap states. Resenting the wealth of the Core but lacking the ability to project combat power and effectively sustain offensive operations against it abroad, Gap states and disenchanted supranational groups will likely seize the opportunity to engage Core interests and military forces in Gap states.

The power inequities between the Core and the Gap also increase the likelihood of armed conflict in the Gap by lowering Core states' inhibitions. The perception of the Gap's technological and military inferiority removes one of the primary inhibitors to armed conflict, the associated risk of war. With much of the chance seemingly removed, the decision to engage in armed conflict to achieve objectives rather than using slower diplomatic, informational, or economic measures appears increasingly rational for Core states.

The final reason conflict is more likely in the Gap is that if Core states do engage in conflict, they will likely do it in the Gap using proxies. This practice was common during the Cold War when the threat of nuclear annihilation made direct confrontation undesirable to all concerned (Knox and Murray 2001, 11). This trend will likely reemerge if another rival rises to challenge the U.S.' influence in an area of strategic importance. This form of proxy warfare allows parties to clash but reduces the risks to each side by eliminating damage to internal infrastructure, minimizing the effects on civilian populations, and removing the perception of direct threat. This makes these conflicts more rational for Core states and limits escalation.

Table 2. Conflict Location Analysis

	Conflict inhibitors	Conflict stimulators
Core versus Core	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Stable</li> <li>2. Strong central governments</li> <li>3. High standard of living</li> <li>4. Economic interdependence</li> <li>5. Risk to privileged status</li> <li>6. Open channels of communication and diplomacy</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Desire for upward movement in system</li> <li>2. Legitimate issues in contention</li> </ol>
Gap versus Gap	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mutually hurting stalemate</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unstable</li> <li>2. Weak or oppressive governments</li> <li>3. Low standard of living</li> <li>4. Scarcity of resources</li> <li>5. Mass urbanization</li> <li>6. Population explosions</li> <li>7. Accessibility of low cost weapons</li> </ol>
Core versus Gap	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. International pressure</li> <li>2. Domestic peace movements</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Low risk</li> <li>2. Preserve the system</li> <li>3. Humanitarian interventions</li> <li>4. Low risk confrontations through proxies</li> <li>5. Harbor terrorist organizations</li> </ol>
Gap versus Core	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Limited ability to project power</li> <li>2. Inability to sustain operations</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Histories of colonialism and oppression</li> <li>2. Relative standard of living</li> <li>3. Invidious comparisons</li> <li>4. Little vested interest in preserving system</li> <li>5. Desire to actively disrupt/remake system</li> <li>6. Proliferation of WMD</li> <li>7. Perception Core will not use WMD</li> </ol>

Source: Created by author.

### Nature

It is clear based on recent trends and this analysis that the Gap is likely location of future U.S. armed conflict. Having determined this, attention now shifts to determining

the nature of Gap conflict. Because armed conflict is likely to occur in their countries and communities, its nature for them will closely resemble that of intrastate wars. Thus, intrastate conflicts will be a primary focus of this analysis. The goal is to determine the emotionality and intractability of these conflicts.

### Emotionality

#### Intrastate dynamics

In intrastate conflicts, belligerents often live, work, and recreate in close proximity to each other. This creates a level of intimacy, inescapability, and pervasiveness not seen in most international conflicts (Lederach 2004, 14-15). The intimate knowledge each party has of the other makes these conflicts especially personal. The inescapability of the relationship or inability to separate parties during lulls or post hostilities limits de-escalation because parties are never provided space or time to cool emotions and regain objectivity. Constant contact keeps the conflict at the forefront of each party's mind and ensures it maintain a high level of emotion (Coleman 2006, 538).

The fact that these conflicts are often fought in the neighborhoods, villages, and communities of one if not both belligerents also increases their emotionality. It creates the perception that there is no escape or withdraw. Belligerents are under constant pressure. Relaxing risks ones home and total annihilation (Wessels 2004, 80). Additionally, families are drawn into the conflict, often targeted by opposition groups. Soldiers generally accept risk to self, but atrocities committed against their families significantly increase emotionality and justifies retribution.

## Issues

A legitimate scarcity of basic resources underlies most conflicts in the Gap. Entire populations hover just above the subsistence level, barely meeting basic needs. Conflict exacerbates already challenging conditions, reducing the available labor pool, making conditions unsafe for normal economic activities, and damaging already inadequate infrastructure (Wessels and Monteiro 2001, 262). This additional strain causes conflicts over resource availability to be matters of survival not economic prosperity. The gravity of this significantly increases the intensity of these conflicts.

The fact that access to resources is often tied to identity group membership adds a relational aspect to the conflict, heightening the emotions associated with it. The conflict is reframed in us versus them terms, placing the survival of entire cultures in the balance. This threat increases feeling of ethnocentrism and increases the stakes for all parties, making them deeply personal and emotional (Fisher 2006, 180).

## Intractability

The existing intractable conflict literature suggests that these conflicts differ from more manageable disputes in five primary domains: context, issues, relations, processes, and outcomes. Having determined that the U.S. military intervention is more likely to occur in the Gap, it is necessary to examine Gap conflict using this framework. This will determine its general level of intractability.

## Context

A review of the literature suggests that an intractable conflict's context differs from more manageable ones in two primary ways. They have long histories of oppression

and high levels of instability associated with them (Coleman 2006, 534, 537). Both of these characteristics are common in the Gap. Most countries in the Gap were colonial possession or otherwise externally exploited during their history. Even after colonial powers withdrew or were expelled, equally oppressive local regimes often assumed power. A legacy of oppression has resulted in a pervasive sense of victimization, strong in-group and out-group distinctions, and distrust of authority and power.

The Gap also has a long history of instability. The oppressiveness and ineffectiveness of governments leads to a tumultuous relationship between the government and governed. Governments struggle to provide services, control crime, and reduce poverty. They are often only capable of these basic governmental functions in selected areas and for certain groups. An unwillingness or inability to address the general population's concerns and improve conditions leads to wide-scale dissatisfaction and violence. As conditions worsen, disenfranchised groups often attempt to overthrow the government (Wessells 2004, 87).

Because of an inability to administer and exert authority over the entire country, countries are often subdivided into smaller territories that change hands according to shifting balances of power. The areas not deemed critical for securing power are often left to descend into anarchic chaos. No side has the requisite resources to influence or control them so no attempt is made to maintain order (Kaplan 1994, 85). Population centers, on the other hand, are generally considered strategically important by both sides and are therefore fiercely contested. Thus they are frequently the targets and locations of battles. This increases the pervasiveness of the conflict and the sense of instability as different groups vie for power (Lederach 2004, 17-18).

## Issues

Intractable conflicts tend to revolve around issues that are not easily compromised or subdivided (Coleman 2006, 537-38). A legitimate scarcity of resources tends to be a reoccurring theme in Gap scenarios. The general level of poverty and the governments' limited ability to meet basic needs coupled with mass urbanization and overpopulation makes a serious situation critical (Kaplan 1994, 89). In the Core, resource conflicts determine relative economic prosperity. In the Gap, they are normally a matter of survival and thus provide less room for compromise.

While many conflicts have a resource component, determining the true or even primary issue in contention is often impossible. Because critical shortages lead to hoarding by the government and other powerful groups who then distribute supplies to their clan, ethnic, tribe, or religious group members, access to resources is directly linked to group memberships (Christie, Wagner, and Winter 2001, 8). By linking control of critical resources to group memberships, a relational dimension is added to a previously substantive conflict, making dividing issues into more manageable pieces increasingly difficult (Deutsch 1973, 67-71).

Additionally, the more central the group membership in conflict is to the individual's or group's self concept, the more difficult the conflict will be to resolve. Ethnic, clan, and religious identities tend to be deep-rooted and important aspects of an individual's or group's self-concept. There is often little room for compromise on issues that challenge such a central part of a group's identity. These conflicts can be especially difficult to resolve if parties truly believe that inherent and fundamental differences make coexistence impossible.

## Relations

Relationships in intractable conflicts are characterized as exclusive but inescapable, polarized, and intense (Coleman 2006, 538-39). Group relationships in the Gap display all of these characteristics. The large disparity in wealth common in the Gap between the privileged and the oppressed contributes to the paradox of exclusive but inescapable relationships. These societies' stratified nature leads to little meaningful contact between groups. This lack of contact sustains negative perceptions, reduces the chances for understanding or empathy, and strengthens ethnocentric tendencies (Coleman 2006, 538; Fisher 1990, 100). Without contact, groups are not exposed to information that contradicts their negative perceptions and conflict narrative so they become increasingly convinced of their truth.

While there is little meaningful contact in these relationships, the lack of geographic separation and interdependence makes them inescapable. Parties frequently live and work in close proximity with oppositional groups, often interacting daily on a superficial level. This closeness in the midst of exclusive social structures and episodic violence heightens the sense of in-group and out-group distinctions and increases the conflict's saliency. Lacking disconfirming data, in-group discourse increasingly polarizes the relationship. The differences between groups become an important part of how each group defines itself. In an attempt to maintain self-worth and esteem, groups cast themselves and their actions in a favorable light and disparage other groups (Fisher 1990, 29; Coleman and Lowe 2007, 381). That the social stratification in these countries is usually along ethnic or religious lines only complicates matters, anchoring the conflict in an identity that groups are unable or unwilling to change or compromise. As the

relationship continues to polarize, criticisms become more severe, justified, and important to conflict narratives, intensifying the conflict's internal dynamics (Coleman and Lowe 2007, 379; Deutsch 1973, 82-4; Fisher 1990, 100).

## Processes

Conflict related social processes are more emotional, malignant, and pervasive in intractable conflicts than they are in more resolvable ones (Coleman 2006, 539-40). As discussed previously, intrastate conflicts are intensely emotional. The combination of long-histories of oppression and atrocities, highly central issues, and the strong in-group versus out-group relational dynamics led to deep-rooted emotional conflicts.

These strong emotions and the lack of crosscutting relationships facilitate the formation of negative perceptions and attitudes that cause transitory emotions to have a long-term qualitative effect on interactions. This can result in a stable pattern of behavior that once reciprocated initiates an escalatory pattern that often culminates in the dehumanization of the other party (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 111-12). When this occurs, the other no longer falls within the moral scope and is no longer entitled to the same standards of moral treatment (Coleman et al. 2007, 11). This can lead to exponential increases in violence and antagonism.

The inescapability consistent with intrastate conflicts causes it to pervade every level and aspect of society. Because communities serve as battlefields, the intensity of the conflict is not localized to combatants. It spreads to elements of society that would be largely unaffected in conventional international warfare (Lederach 2004, 13). This creates positive feedback loops throughout the societal structure, reinforcing malignant processes.

## Outcomes

Protracted trauma and the normalization of violence are outcomes that differentiate intractable conflict from those more easily resolved. It is not surprising that protracted trauma is common in intrastate conflicts and the Gap. The long duration of many of these conflicts and their violent nature leads to prolonged exposure to trauma. Because these conflicts are fought in communities, its effects pervade every level and aspect of society (Lederach 2004, 17-18). Additionally, the sense of lawlessness that accompanies intrastate wars and the lack conflict inhibiting structural and psychological mechanisms results in widespread atrocities, thus rape, murder, and acts of humiliation are added to the usual trauma associated with armed conflict (Coleman 2006, 540).

Overtime, protracted armed conflict and trauma lead to a normalization of violence. Through the desensitization process, the use of violence and force is increasingly seen as a viable option for settling disputes (Coleman 2006, 541). Because children are raised and socialized in the midst of the conflict, this normalization is spread to entire societies. Entire generations are socialized to believe that violence is a viable, if not the preferred, method of conflict resolution. These societies, therefore, lack many of the conflict inhibiting norms present in most cultures (Wessells 2004, 81). This greatly inhibits the effectiveness of more peaceful resolution efforts.

It is worth noting that most of the factors that stimulate and maintain internal conflict between rival power groups or the populace and the government in the Gap could easily be redirected against the Core. That many of these countries were colonies makes the possibility that anger currently directed at the government for oppressive practices could easily be displaced on the Core. Additionally, disparities in access to resources and

living standards are greater between the Core and Gap than they are between different levels of society in the Gap. That access to resources is directly related to Core and Gap distinctions provides a relational aspect to the conflict (Deutsch 1973, 67-71).

Mass media, the internet, and the proliferation of U.S. culture through music, television, and movies add a degree of inescapability to the relationship. However, there is little if any meaningful contact that might humanize and individualize either group. This facilitates the formation and maintenance of negative perceptions and attitudes which reduces empathy and can lead to autistic hostilities between Gap and Core citizens.

This has serious implications for military interventions. Autistic hostilities can result in the Gap countries and populations resenting and attacking Core forces, even if they deployed to provide humanitarian assistance. An underlying intergroup conflict between the Core and the Gap simmers just below the surface, waiting for an opportunity to express itself. Core military intervention often provides the stimulus required to actualize this potential conflict.

### Conflict Paradigms

The analysis to this point has provided some general parameters for the nature of Twenty-first Century conflict. All indications are that the conflicts the U.S. will be increasingly involved in will occur in Gap countries, be highly emotional, and intractable in nature. It is now possible to juxtapose these characteristics and dynamics against each conflict paradigm's relative strengths and weaknesses. This analysis provides the information required to determine the most appropriate paradigm for the U.S. in the Twenty-first Century.

## Realist Paradigm

The realist paradigm views conflict as a real incompatibility of interests between parties over scarce resources and power imbalances. It operates under the assumption that parties in conflict act rationally according to strategic interests to maximize their power and share of high stake resources. The primacy of power and rational decision-making in this school causes its intervention to be heavily reliant on the use of force to achieve goals. It believes that a party with a marked power advantage can bend the other to its will. In conflict resolution terms, a party uses its power advantage to deter acts of aggression and bolster stability. This creates an environment where the substantive issues that created the conflict can be addressed through redistributions of power, government and judicial reforms, and improvements to infrastructure and the government's ability to meet the population's needs.

### Strengths

Because of the rampant instability that typifies the Gap and the ubiquity of “might makes right” thinking, power is often necessary to separate parties, deter further aggression, and provide the security necessary for additional reforms. Realist strategies are explicitly designed to accomplish this, anticipating this as the first step in armed conflict intervention. Their strategies and methods have demonstrated the ability to suppress conflict to a manageable level for an extended period of time. Additionally, the role governmental inefficiency, corruption, and nepotism play in conflict formation makes redressing these issues a priority for successful intervention efforts. Because the realist paradigm evolved out of the political science and international affairs disciplines,

it is uniquely suited and capable of this. It possesses a multitude of strategies, concepts, and tools that were specifically generated for these problems.

### Weaknesses

Embedded in the realist paradigm is the assumption that the conflicts associated psychological and social phenomena are byproducts not causes. This assumption results in it not explicitly targeting these issues during interventions. Its practitioners believe that once the “real issues” are addressed that relational and process aspects of the conflict will resolve themselves. As evidenced by the number of conflicts that continue after the original issue is resolved or forgotten, this is a faulty assumption. Overtime, strong emotions and repeated negative interactions transform conflicts from being purely substantive to a mix including relational issues (Fisher 2006, 180). Goals begin to reflect relative standards not objective ones. Beating the other group is as important as meeting group needs. When a conflict is framed this way, solving substantive issues will not precipitate the conflict’s end. Until the relational and process aspects are resolved, parties will find new issues to justify the conflict’s continuance.

Another limitation of the realist approach in resolving Gap and intrastate conflicts is its heavy reliance on statist based interventions. Though the realist perspective is not explicitly tied to statist based approaches and they can be decoupled conceptually, in practice they are usually used together. The lack of functioning governments in the Gap, the likelihood that sovereignty is one of the principal issues in contention, and the resentment many supranational actors have for the statist system present obstacles for an approach that relies on governmental coordination and respect for international norms of

behavior. Through the use of power these approaches frequently suppress conflict to a manageable level, but once force is removed it normally resumes.

### Human Relations

The human relations paradigm believes that above all else conflict is a human endeavor, highly contingent on the relationships and social processes between parties. It views conflict as a dysfunctional relationship locked in an escalatory cycle of increasingly hostile and destructive behavior, identifying fear, mistrust and reciprocated contentious behavior as impediments to constructive engagement. Since, it believes that the quality of interactions is the primary determinant of conflict formation, maintenance, and resolution, it stresses the importance of subjective psychological processes and targets relationships and these processes with its interventions. Its goal is to shape communities and social conditions so that they facilitate positive interactions. By identifying and emphasizing crosscutting social connections between disputants, practitioners attempt to develop relationships separate from or transcending the conflict.

#### Strengths

Because of the highly personal and emotional nature of intrastate and Gap conflict, decreasing the intensity surrounding the situation is often necessary before other aspects can be addressed. The human relations paradigm's concepts and tools are ideally suited to provide insight into the effects of emotion and the human dimension of conflict. Focused on improving the psychological and social aspects of interactions, their interventions target the damaged relationships and malignant social processes that sustain conflicts. Their tools have demonstrated the ability to de-escalate the emotions

surrounding a conflict to a level that facilitates constructive engagement and cooperation. This positive interaction can lead to a conflict transformation where both sides recognize the problem as the common enemy and develop strategies to solve it jointly.

### Weaknesses

The primacy of subjective psychological and social processes as a cause of conflict in the human relations paradigm may cause it to under appreciate or ignore substantive issues. Given the relatively impoverished conditions in the Gap, not addressing legitimate issues will inhibit the effectiveness of intervention efforts. Additionally, this perspective relies on the good faith of parties to sustain peace during the resolution process. It lacks the mechanisms and strategies required to separate parties, deter violence, and prevent the resumption of renewed hostilities. This is a serious limitation because of the disproportionately large effect negative actions have on the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of parties in conflict. One violent or antagonistic act could effectively destroy nascent trust and hope in the peace process, erasing any progress made.

### Systems Paradigm

The systems paradigm views conflict as a destructive pattern of social interaction that evolves overtime as interrelated elements interact across domains and levels. This approach posits that conflicts are complex systems consisting of context, issues, relationships, processes, and outcomes. Because of the complexity of the system and the interdependence of elements, it believes that analysis of individual elements in isolation is superficial and flawed. Meaningful analysis must focus on all the variables and the

relationship between them. Armed with these insights, practitioners can develop interventions that reinforce one another across domains and levels, affecting fundamental changes in the system's deep structures.

### Strengths

Because of the diverse array of challenges and problems the U.S. will face in future conflicts, it needs an approach more consistent with its experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. The systems paradigm's more holistic view provides a more thorough and complete understanding of complex conflicts. It provides new insights into conflict formation, maintenance, and resolution that assist practitioners in visualizing the conflict's current state and dynamics. The greatest strength of the system's perspective, however, is it increases the available options for intervention. By providing an overarching framework, multiple paradigms' theories, concepts and tools can be incorporated into a comprehensive integrated approach. This will allow practitioners to capitalize on the relative strengths of multiple paradigms.

### Weaknesses

Regrettably, the systems perspective is the least developed of all the conflict paradigms. Its inherent complexity resists laboratory replication and it is impossible to isolate variables in real world settings. The dynamical systems theory approach to intractable conflict is one of the first attempts to develop theories, concepts, and tools that can be tested. Using computer simulations, it has demonstrated promise in depicting and altering the dynamics of these complex social systems, but more work is necessary to make this approach more practical for field use.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

. . . the aims a belligerent adopts, and the resources he employs, must be governed by the particular characteristics of his own; but they will also conform to the spirit of the age and to its general character. Finally, they must always be governed by the general conclusions to be drawn from the nature of war itself.

— Carl von Clausewitz

#### Conclusion

The conflicts that the U.S. is currently and will find itself involved in are fundamentally different than the ones it has traditionally prepared. Historically the U.S. prepared for armed conflict with a peer or near-peer states. The British, Spanish, Germans, and Soviets were all regional or global powers when they were the U.S.’ principal adversary. They had strong central governments that clearly controlled their foreign policy, making economically rational decisions based on national strategic interests.

The realist paradigm with its embedded statist approaches served the U.S. well throughout much of its history. It was instrumental in its successful navigation of the World Wars, led to the creation of a system that resulted in lasting peace in Europe, and the U.S.’ rise to preeminence in the international system as a global hegemonic power. There is, however, mounting evidence that it is not appropriate or effective for smaller regional wars like the U.S. is currently engaged.

These conflicts and the ones the U.S. will likely engage in the future are not fought by peer states. Belligerents are often not states at all. Many of the conflicts will start as intrastate conflicts between sub and supra national groups. The U.S. will only become involved to localize the conflict’s effects, stabilize the region, and avert

humanitarian crises. Underlying tensions between the Gap and Core over unequal access to power and resources combined with perceived value differences will often result in belligerents actively targeting U.S. forces. Thus, the U.S. will become entangled in conflicts with very different characteristics and dynamics than the ones it has traditionally prepared.

Recent trends and predictive analysis suggest that the U.S.' future conflicts will be more emotional and intractable than the ones it prepared for in the past. The realist paradigm with its explicit focus on rational decision-making fails to provide needed insights into the cognitions and behaviors of highly emotional actors. Additionally, focusing almost exclusively on the substantive issues, it fails to account for the subjective and social aspects of conflict. This limits its analysis and the effectiveness of its traditional resolution strategies that rely on actors making economically rational decisions and focus on resolving disputes over substantive issues. As discussed previously, it requires a more decisive victory, higher casualties, and greater conflict related costs to deter or enforce compliance from a highly emotional individual, group, or nation than an objective rational actor might suppose.

Additionally, the statist based interventions embedded in the realist perspective are limited in their ability to address the conflicts the U.S. is currently engaged. They lack the requisite concepts and focus to effectively address the relational, process, and outcome elements of intractable conflicts because it believes that they are byproducts not causes or forces that sustain it. They also lack the mechanisms to effectively engage the disparate groups associated with internal conflicts. In fact, their reliance on the current international system's recognized actors, rules, and norms to affect change may actually

exacerbate conditions. Frequently, Gap states, sub-national, and supra national groups are dissatisfied with the current international system, believing it disadvantages them. Therefore, they distrust its methods and actors, preferring no help than assistance from the Core.

The human relations paradigm is equally insufficient to deal with the complex intractable conflicts facing the U.S. Its sometimes myopic focus on conflict's subjective aspects ignores the effect legitimate conflicts of interest have in the Gap. With entire populations hovering just above the subsistence level, failing to appreciate these issues limits the effectiveness of its analysis.

Additionally, the human relations perspective lacks the concepts and methods to address the context and substantive issues of intractable conflicts. They are limited in their ability to improve infrastructure, resolve legitimate conflicts of interest, and lack the expertise and ability to enforce compliance. Ideally, both parties will internalize compliance and commitment to the peace process, but they rarely do initially. More often parties must be forcefully separated, a task the human relations perspective cannot achieve through its strategies and methods.

Recognizing the complexity, emotionality, and intractability of its future conflicts, the U.S. must adopt a more holistic approach to conflict resolution. The realist and human relations paradigms both lack the theories, concepts, and tools required to analyze and address the multiple and varied elements of intractable conflicts individually. Each has theories and concepts that provide insights into certain elements of the conflict, but neither can provide the level of understanding required to fundamentally alter the

system's dynamics. Therefore, their tools and methods are able to perturb intractable conflict systems temporarily, but not affect lasting change.

The systems perspective fully appreciates the complexity of intractable conflict systems, providing new and valuable insights into conflict formation and maintenance that practitioners can use to design and monitor more effective resolution strategies. The dynamical systems perspective, in particular, demonstrates potential for increasing understanding of the complexity and dynamics of these conflicts. The concept of attractors, in particular, provides new opportunities for intervention, targeting dysfunctional relationships and malignant processes to ameliorate conditions and more importantly positively adjust the dynamics of interaction. It also provides an overarching framework to incorporate the strengths of the realist and human relations techniques into a cohesive approach.

This approach would address all five domains of intractable conflicts: context, issues, relations, processes, and outcomes. It would apply the most appropriate techniques to reduce negative and build positive attractors regardless of paradigm. This would maximize the effectiveness of interventions by applying the proper stimulus to each conflict element. Generally, the realist paradigm and its methods and approaches would address the conflict's context and substantive issues. The human relations paradigm's concepts and tools could then be used to address relations, processes, and outcomes. Used in combination and properly synchronized, these approaches could fundamentally alter the conflicts landscape, potentially resolving the conflict and laying the foundation for intractable peace.

### New Approach

Intractable conflicts are the result of a complex dynamic interaction of context, issues, relations, processes, and outcomes. Therefore, intervention efforts need to target all five of these primary domains to increase the likelihood of success. Because each conflict paradigm has inherent strengths, a multi-disciplinary approach that utilizes the relative strength of each school is likely to produce the best results. The following example provides a framework for targeting each aspect of the conflict by effectively applying concepts, strategies, and tools from the most appropriate conflict paradigm.

#### Addressing Context

The realist paradigm is well-suited for addressing the context of intractable conflicts. Additionally, it is the conflict aspect most aligned with traditional conceptualization of the military's role in conflict resolution. In fact, many of the U.S. military's concepts and strategies for counterinsurgency and stability operations specifically target this element of conflict.

#### Bring Stability

Providing stability and security is one of the initial tasks to accomplish in armed conflict intervention. Military members are frequently required to separate belligerents, enforce peace terms, or create space for other efforts. There are two primary strategies the military uses to bring security to combat zones: counter-tactic or aerial denial and counter insurgent. Counter-tactic operations focus on identifying the insurgents' direct action tactics and then developing strategies to prevent their effective use. Frequently, this ends with the placement of forces to deny the insurgent access to terrain suitable for and likely

targets of their attacks.<sup>18</sup> Counter-insurgent tactics are almost exclusively oriented on insurgent organizations. The primary goal is to aggressively gather intelligence that leads to the identification and elimination of insurgent networks from operator to financier. While one is largely defensive and the other offensive, they both aim to provide security and limit the destabilizing potential of groups opposed to the peace process.

These strategies are necessary to separate parties and provide the requisite security for other more meaningful and long-term interventions to occur, but are insufficient to secure lasting peace. The denial of tactics or terrain will force insurgents to change tactics and areas of operation, but will do nothing to reduce the conflict. The removal of violent radical leadership without addressing the conditions that facilitated their ascension to power will result in the rise of equally militant members from the ranks of the populace. Counter-tactic and Counter-insurgent strategies are capable of suppressing an insurgency, but without additional measures are incapable of resolving it. Additionally, any positive effects achieved exclusively through these strategies are short-term, require the continued application of power to maintain, and limit trust repair and cooperation between parties (Coleman and Voronov 2003, 231-32). In fact, both strategies are counterproductive in the long run. The constant presence of military security forces creates a perception of instability and danger, preventing populations from returning to a state of normalcy. It is also a benign start to oppressive practices that will in time turn the population against the peacekeepers, host nation, or third party.

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<sup>18</sup>The placement of Soldiers along Route Irish to reduce the number of IEDs is an example of counter-tactic or area denial techniques.

This highlights the paradoxical effects of power in conflict situations. It is often necessary initially, but normally results in increased animosity over time. Because of this contradiction, the timing and duration of interventions contingent on power must be carefully considered, planned, and executed. Equally important is that these efforts are explained and transparent. Accurately relaying the purpose and duration of these interventions can minimize the potential for discrepancies between intent and impact, preventing those opposed to the process from sabotaging it.

### Addressing Histories of Oppression

Histories of oppression have deep reaching effects on conflict dynamics. They engender feelings of distrust, resentment, and revenge that challenge resolution efforts. Because neither party can change the past, these feelings are difficult to address or ameliorate. Eliminating their conflict stimulating effects is challenging as long the oppression is salient in the group's collective narrative and memory. Therefore efforts to reduce the saliency are critical. Addressing structural violence is the most likely way to accomplish this and is covered in more detail below.

### Addressing Issues

There are normally a host of issues in contention when groups engage in large-scale armed conflict. Needs frustration and state legitimacy are two of the most common themes. Traditionally, governmental and international organizations address these issues through a series of diplomatic initiatives and negotiations while the military provides the

necessary security and stability.<sup>19</sup> Because of the violent nature of these conflicts and the size of the challenge, many of the international and governmental organizations are unwilling or incapable of leading these efforts. This has forced the military to fill the void and led to an evolution in military thought, doctrine, and practice. Moving from simply suppressing the conflict to a manageable level, military strategies now attempt to redress the root causes of the conflict, specifically addressing issues.

### Addressing Root Causes

#### Essential Services

A recurring theme in 21st Century conflict is a gross dissatisfaction with the status quo. Increasing awareness of a relatively deprived condition generates resentment towards the government or international system. Improving essential service delivery is one of the principal ways to improve living conditions and reduce this dissatisfaction. Repairing infrastructure, expanding public services, and delivering needed supplies can ease suffering, improve conditions, reduce feelings of relative deprivation, and de-escalate the conflict. Practitioners need to be aware, however, that a rise in violence and dissatisfaction often accompanies an initial improvement in conditions because progress rarely keeps pace with rising expectations (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 21-22).

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<sup>19</sup>This assumption was reflected in the military's peace operations literature and was consistent with their experiences in the Balkans. Military forces largely separated parties and ensured that a combination of governmental, non-governmental, and international organizations could operate freely.

## Governance

Because questions of governmental authority and legitimacy are common in many of these conflicts, improving governance is a priority. Ensuring the government is acceptable and representative of the populace by administering a fair election process is one of the first steps. The government must also demonstrate its ability to provide essential services to its populations. Security is often the first and most visible service it must provide. Therefore, efforts to develop functioning host nation security forces are a top priority during early efforts. Additionally, establishing systems for the population to voice grievances and mechanisms for the government to respond is critical to improving governance. U.S. has effectively executed these strategies and techniques in multiple countries. Its foreign assistance programs provide the training and equipment necessary to develop a competent security force and establish functional systems of governance. A remaining challenge for the U.S. is developing an elicitive approach rather than prescriptive ones that value local traditions and culture.

## Addressing Structural Violence

In many of the environments the U.S. military forces will deploy its military forces have long histories of oppression where ethnicity is directly aligned with social class. While these histories and their effects on conflict are difficult to address directly, the systems, structures, and policies that enabled one group to systematically oppress another need to be addressed. Referred to as structural or systemic violence, these are measures that maintain the privilege and subordination of groups in the current system (Wessells 2004, 87-88). They typically consist of discriminatory hiring practices, unequal access to education, and poverty. Structural violence is especially insidious because it can

sustain itself after overt processes are removed. Extreme poverty places a premium on working. This limits a group's ability to provide and receive education. Without adequate education, populations no longer qualify for jobs, eliminating the need for discriminatory hiring practices. This effectively disadvantages one group, while simultaneously justifying their subordination to those the system privileges.<sup>20</sup>

The first step in eliminating structural violence is identifying it. Once identified, the government needs to actively minimize nepotism and establish fair policies and procedures for hiring. These systems need to be transparent because the perception of procedural justice is more important than fair outcomes (Deutsch 2006b, 13). Procedural justice builds trust and faith in the system. Overtime, this faith and trust will result in an increased commitment to the authorities, government organizations, and the larger system (Deutsch 2006b, 13). Additionally, because of its ability to covertly enable structural violence and systemic oppression, fair access to education is essential. This may necessitate welfare supports to ensure poor families do not have to choose between having food and going to school. If this is not addressed, overt systems can be dismantled without effectively resolving the issue.

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<sup>20</sup>Though more severe in the Gap, it is not exclusively their problem. The legacy of slavery still affects U.S. race relations. Even after the formal end of slavery, there were multiple systems, structures, and policies that limited upward mobility and maintained a strictly stratified social system based on race. Poverty demographics and access to quality education indicate that there are still residual effects today. This highlights the difficulty of truly resolving these issues even when a society commits significant energy to reducing their effects.

## Addressing Relationships

Destructive antagonistic relationships are one of the primary obstacles to intractable conflict resolution. Groups in conflict frequently perceive their primary identity groups to be fundamentally incompatible. Some conflict resolution theory recommends changing these identity groups to resolve the conflict. If this is not impossible, it is close. The identity groups involved in intense armed conflicts tend to be central to an individual's or group's self-concept, believing that they are amenable to change belies their importance and resistance to manipulation.

Two more plausible alternatives are demonstrating that there is no fundamental incompatibility between groups and reintroducing complexity to the relationship. Few groups are inherently incompatible. However, legitimate conflicts over resources, power, values, and need satisfaction lead to in-group cohesion and out-group hostility (Fisher 1990, 99-100). In resource conflicts, delinking the issues from these group memberships is one way to reduce perceptions of incompatibility. For example, decoupling access to power and ethnicity can remove the relational aspect of the conflict. This is analogous to reducing structural oppression and is clearly more difficult than it sounds. Because group cohesion and ethnocentrism both increase in competitive environments, groups are hesitant to relinquish advantages in conflict situations. If it is a perceived value conflict, then demonstrating commonalities between groups and minimizing differences can potentially reduce relational tension. Additionally, identifying discrepancies in group narratives can alleviate tensions. For example, highlighting passages in the Koran that mandate tolerance of Jews and Christians because of their shared belief in previously divine teachings forces militants to reconcile this with more extreme passages (Lewis

2002, 113). This inconsistency challenges simplistic good versus evil assertions and frames.

Another potentially more fruitful option is reintroducing complexity to the relationship. In intractable conflicts beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions are positively aligned with group memberships so that they begin to reinforce each other (Coleman 2006, 335). Frequently, this results in perceptions of identity collapsing around the group membership in conflict. Parties perceive themselves and the other exclusively in these terms, believing that each is diametrically opposed to the other.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, both parties overestimate the cohesiveness of each group, believing that all members equally share the same goals, perceptions, and attitudes with respect to the other party and the conflict. Frequently, the most militant or extreme members of a group tend to rise in leadership and speak for the group (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 117-18). This provides a false sense of extremism and solidarity. This press for coherence reinforces the conflict by creating the perception of fundamental incompatibility, which prevents compromise or cooperation and is graphically depicted in figure 4.

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<sup>21</sup>Jews' and Palestinians' perceptions of themselves and each other during intifadas are useful examples of this phenomenon

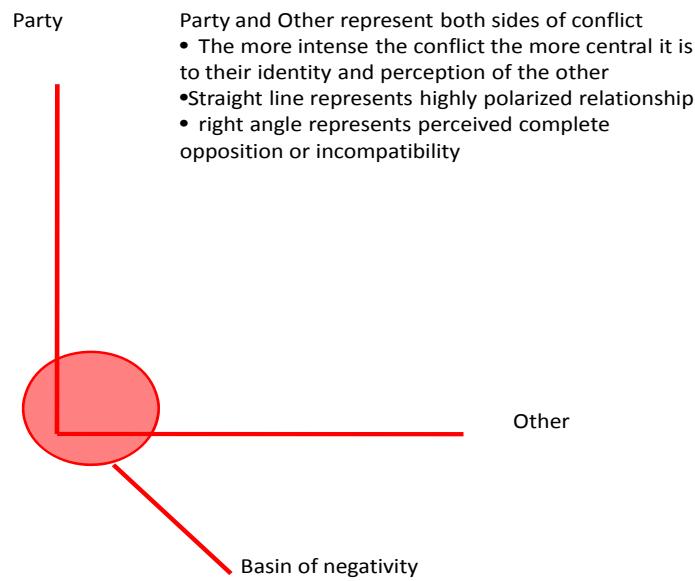
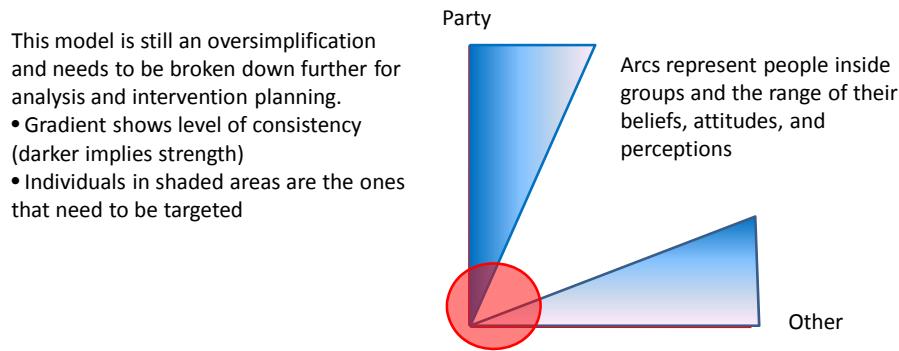


Figure 4. Perceived Incompatibility in Intense Conflicts  
*Source:* Created by author.

This is a gross oversimplification of even the most cohesive group. Every group has some variance in opinion and attitude (see figure 5). Additionally, individuals have multiple identities and group memberships. Some of the identities and group memberships cross cut the conflict and may provide opportunities for affiliation across opposition lines. The problem in conflict situations is that these group memberships are overshadowed by the hyper-salient conflict identity group. The challenge is to increase cross cutting identities' saliency and reemphasize the complexity of the social system.



It is important to realize that all individuals inside the arc do not have equal ability to affect the dynamics of the system

Changes in the attitudes of key leaders have largest impact

- often found at midlevel; mid level leaders often have contact and credibility with elites and bottom level
- top level often do not represent masses (not really leaders), invested in status quo
- bottom level too close to not meeting basic needs to risk change
- everyone is risk averse, takes leader w/charisma to mobilize change

**Figure 5. Actual Group Variance in Perceptions, Attitudes, and Goals**  
*Source:* Created by author.

The first step in achieving this is identifying potential commonalities by analyzing identity and group membership that might overlap and lead to more functional relationships. While there are an infinite number of possible identities, some of the more common and potentially useful for identifying cross cutting bonds are profession, religion, social or civic issue, and goals. Conducting this analysis will identify both problem areas and possible commonalities to address or emphasize respectively. This should provide opportunities to decrease negative and increase positive attractors.

Religious differences often represent legitimate value differences with little variance on either side (see figure 6). The differing importance given to direct descendancy from Mohammed by Sunnis and Shias is an example of these types of

differences. These differences are often irresolvable. The goal, however, is to demonstrate that these differences do not preclude peaceful coexistence and cooperation. If both parties accept this, this particular identity group should decrease in importance. Additionally, returning to the Shia and Sunni example, there are more commonalities than differences between the two faiths. Actively focusing on similarities can reduce the saliency of the differences.

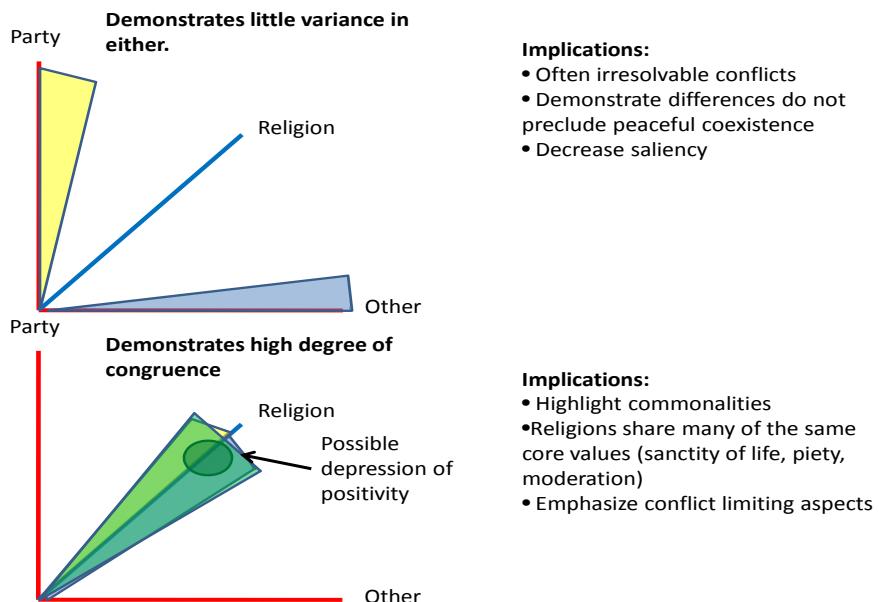


Figure 6. Religion

Source: Created by Author

An analysis of professions that does not reveal cross cutting relationships between groups in conflict suggests that group membership determines career and employment opportunity (see figure 7). This probably indicates unequal access to resources and opportunities, revealing structural and systemic oppression. As discussed previously, practitioners must address structural oppression for lasting conflict resolution. They need

to be aware, however, that addressing these issues is likely to result in a temporary increase in hostilities. Low power groups' expectations normally rise faster than conditions improve and high power groups resent and oppose challenges to their often unrecognized systemic privilege (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 21-22; Coleman 2003, 12).<sup>22</sup>

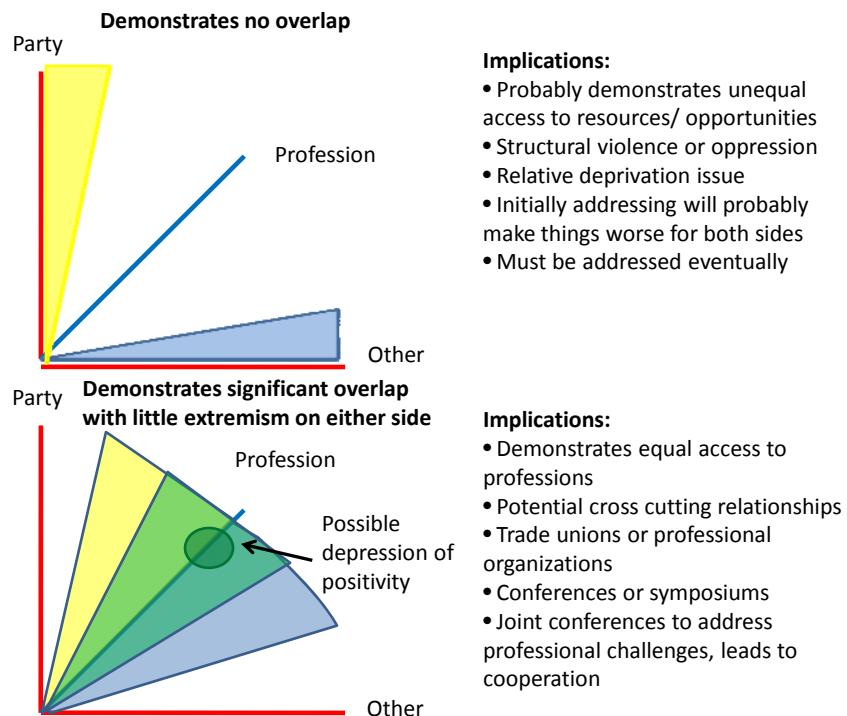


Figure 7. Profession

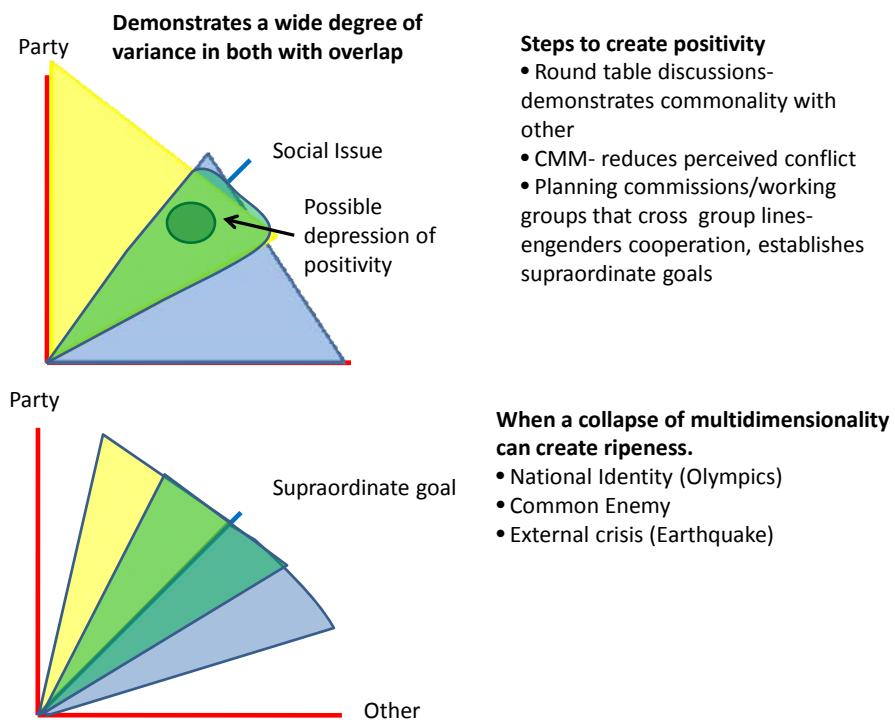
Source: Created by author.

If the analysis identifies professions that both groups share, then establishing trade societies or other professional organizations can result in positive perceptions of opposing group members. This increased contact in non-conflict situations reduces

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<sup>22</sup>The mixed reactions to affirmative action programs in the U.S. illustrate the conflict escalating effects attempts to reduce structural oppression can have.

negative and increases positive perceptions of opposition groups. Additionally, people regardless of ethnic, religious, or cultural affiliations often share political or social views. Shared beliefs on the universal right of suffrage, importance of education, or a host of other possible issues can lead to relationships that transcend the overarching conflict (see figure 8). Supra-ordinate goals that transcend the conflict can also unify opposition groups in an attempt to achieve a goal each is incapable of attaining without assistance. This provides an incentive for cooperation and creates the potential for a mutually beneficial relationship (see figure 8).



**Figure 8. Social Issues and Supraordinate Goals**  
*Source:* Created by author.

Identifying these cross cutting bonds, areas of commonality, and supra-ordinate goals strain an individual's ability to hold unambiguously negative views of the opposition group. This inability restores a sense of multidimensionality to the relationship and limits negative perceptions of the other. This reduces reinforcing and increases limiting feedback loops in the relationship (Coleman et al. 2006, 71-72).

An excellent example of this is the Polish Round Table negotiations of the late 1980s. Prior to these negotiations, the Polish communist government clashed with pro-democratic dissidents for control of the Polish state. Government officials could not effectively repress the pro-democratic movement and the dissidents could not stage an effective coup. As a result, the 1980s were best described as a mutually hurting stalemate with neither side capable of achieving its goals. In 1989, both parties agreed to begin formal negotiations. Rather than concentrating on the primary issue of political rule, they addressed important sub-issues such as health care, education, media, and the economy (Coleman et al. 2006, 66). Demonstrating progress on these less contentious issues created hope and momentum. It also allowed the opposing parties to interact in a non-threatening environment to solve less contentious problems. They recognized commonalities and shared goals that cross-cut opposition groups, thus reintroducing multidimensionality. As a result, formerly diametrically opposed parties began to define themselves as Polish rather than communist or pro-democratic and cooperate rather than compete.

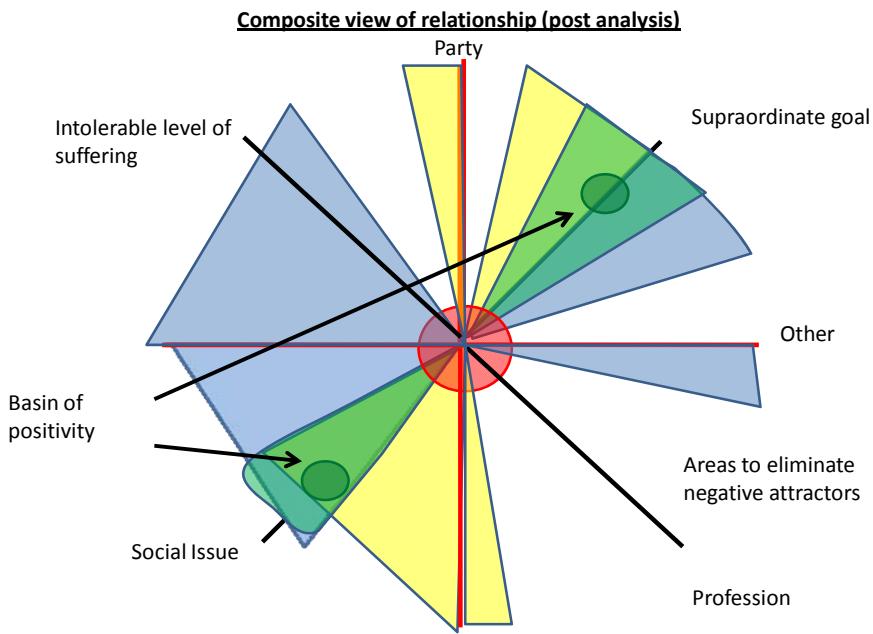


Figure 9. Composite View of Relationship After Analysis

Source: Created by Author

### Addressing Processes

In intractable conflicts, there are often malignant social processes that inhibit resolution. Strong negative emotions result in contentious behavior, which overtime leads to negative perceptions and attitudes about each group. In highly escalated conflicts, these perceptions prevent constructive engagement between parties. Therefore, it is often a precondition to reduce this emotionality before attempting to repair relationships.

### Adjusting Perceptions

Because of their significant influence on conflict escalation, one of the first things to address is negative perceptions and attitudes, especially when they have escalated to dehumanization and deindividualization. One of the simplest and easiest ways to

accomplish this is by increasing contact between parties in non-threatening situations. Positive contact between parties will increase empathy and limit each party's ability to dehumanize and deindividualize the other (Fisher-Yoshida and Wasserman 2006, 577). This may not be feasible for extreme members of opposition groups, but it is normally possible for less extreme members. This demographic should be the target of these interventions because they are more susceptible to co-opting, which will effectively reduce the recruitment base and undermine the support for the opposition's more extreme factions (Deutsch 2006b, 29-32, 35).

In a current military operational context, this type of effort could be accomplished through MEDCAPs, the delivery of supplies to schools or hospitals, or a host of other good will gestures. This increased interaction in objectively positive situations provides disconfirming data to the prevailing group narrative and challenges universally negative perceptions of out-group members (Fisher-Yoshida and Wasserman 2006, 579). While these efforts explicitly target the local national civilians and less extreme members of opposition groups, it has an equally important benefit for military members. Individualizing and humanizing members of the local population reduces the likelihood that military members indiscriminately and disproportionately retaliate against insurgent attacks, a practice that in addition to being inhumane increases support for the opposition (Deutsch 2006b, 37).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>There may be some unintended negative consequences of increasing non-threatening contact between military members and civilians. The influence between exponential increases in violence and dehumanization appears to be bidirectional. It is intuitive that dehumanization can facilitate the catastrophic increase in violence witnessed in intense conflicts and that excessively aggressive behavior from a belligerent can lead to their dehumanization by the victim of their actions. What is less obvious, but

## Improving Communication

Due to the central role communication plays in the formation and deconstruction of negative perceptions, improving communication between parties needs to be a deliberate focus during interactions (Saunders 2003, 94). Simply having contact in situations with conflict limiting norms will frequently result in improved communication. Through casual dialogue, empathy increases and the parties may discover that they have common interests. Once constructive engagement is possible, multiple tools and exercises can be used to further alter negative perceptions. Techniques particularly suited for assisting this are constructive controversy and the use of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) tools. Constructive controversy is an exercise where parties in a conflict

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consistent with personal experience is that participating in a violent act can lead to dehumanization as a retroactive rationalization of behavior inconsistent with core beliefs as a form of psychological defense mechanism. If this is indeed true, it creates a dilemma for commanders. While taking active measures to prevent dehumanization and deindividualization reduces the chances of indiscriminate violence by military members, it also removes one of a Soldier's most basic psychological defense mechanisms. In combat, soldiers are frequently required to do things that violate some of their most basic and core beliefs. Socialized from birth to recognize the sanctity of life soldiers are sometimes required to violate this core belief. Military socialization normally prepares soldiers for the cognitive dissonance killing an enemy combatant creates, which is sufficient for most conventional engagements. It does not always sufficiently prepare them for the conflicting emotions they will face when they encounter the death of an innocent civilian on the battlefield, an occurrence significantly more likely in the conflicts where the combat is predominantly conducted in areas populated by non-combatants. This strain will be significantly greater if the Soldier believes he is complicit in the death. Individualizing and humanizing the civilian population is likely to heighten the psychological dissonance the Soldiers experiences. This is not meant to be a recommendation for deliberately dehumanizing or deindividualizing. To do so would be immoral and counter the ideals the military professes. It is simply to acknowledge that the increased interaction between military members and potential victims of violence has psychological ramifications for military members. The increased contact with civilians that is inherent in stability and peace operations negates many of the military's deliberate depersonalization measures<sup>23</sup> and may result, if it has not already, in the psychological health of U.S. Soldiers being the unanticipated casualty of the "three block war."

alternate positions for subsequent turn in a debate. This forces each party to understand the other's argument so they can build on it. This leads to increased cognitive reasoning, perspective taking, creativity, and may result in attitude change about the issue (Johnson, Johnson, and Tjosvold 2006, 11-17).

Similarly, CMM tools, the hierarchy of meaning and LUUUTT models specifically, can demonstrate the multiple levels, highlight the complexity, and engender respect for multiple perspectives on contentious issues. Using CMM, the assumptions and influences that have shaped the conflict can be identified, providing a richer understanding of the parties and their positions (Pearce and Pearce 2003, 42-44). This approach is advantageous because not only does it provide insights into actual differences between parties, but it also identifies areas of perceived conflict where none may truly exist. In many cases, disputants discover that all that truly exists is error in transmission or receipt of communication.

The LUUUTT model, for example, focuses on stories Lived, stories Untold, stories Unheard, stories Unknown, stories Told, and story Telling. Focusing specifically on the discrepancy between the stories told and those left untold, unheard, and unknown; it is not only possible to recognize where the perceptions came from, but, more importantly, it provides insight into how to adjust these perceptions (Pearce 2004, 47-48). This is critical to resolving the conflict because adjusting these perceptions will assist in reducing the perceived differences in the party. As the parties begin to moderate their views of the other, they will be able to gain a richer understanding of the other perspective. This richer understanding should facilitate a more constructive dialogue

where both parties appreciate the other's views and potentially find common ground (Fisher-Yoshida and Wasserman 2006, 579; Robinson 1995, 188-189).

### Addressing Outcomes

Initially, outcomes appears to be an unnecessary area to address, but it is important to remember the episodic nature of these conflicts. Negative outcomes incite emotion, reinforce perceptions, and damage relationships, which ultimately sustain the conflict and cause it to resurface. Protracted trauma and the normalization of violence are more than byproducts of conflicts. They reinforce escalatory cycles, lead to increasingly violent strategies and interactions, and decrease the likelihood of effective resolution.

Because protracted trauma can result in fear and anger, it often leads to resumption of hostilities. Fear leads to a defensive spiral where violence is used preemptively to protect the group from a perceived threat. Anger and blame often lead retaliatory spirals were a desire for revenge justifies the use of violence and resumption of hostilities (Pruitt and Kim 2004, 104, 110). Addressing protracted trauma is therefore critical to effectively resolve intractable conflicts. Individual counseling, communal healing, truth commissions, and dialogues between parties are common methods to reduce the effects of protracted trauma on conflict maintenance (Wessells 2004, 83-84).

The normalization of violence presents an equally challenging obstacle to enduring conflict resolution. Because of the protracted and all encompassing nature of these conflicts, entire generations have been socialized in the use of violence to achieve ends. It has become a socially acceptable, if not the preferred, method of attaining goals and resolving disputes (Coleman 2006, 541). As long as this is the case, the smallest disputes can result in the resumption of large-scale armed conflict. Addressing the

normalization of violence often requires reeducation and gradual reintegration of parties into peaceful settings.<sup>24</sup> Highlighting conflict limiting aspects of religion and culture play an integral role in this process. For example, emphasizing a culture's belief in the sanctity of life can inhibit more recently learned and salient violent impulses.

### Summary

In the preceding discussion, each element of the conflict system is discussed separately. It is important to recognize they are in reality interdependent, each influencing and being influenced by the others. This can have both positive and negative effects for intervention. For example, de-escalating the emotions surrounding interactions can have a positive effect on the relationship. This interdependence also highlights the potential for high pay-off interventions that effectively target multiple aspects of the conflict simultaneously. Bringing opposition groups together in round table forums can effectively target issues, relationships, and processes. The overt task should address substantive and procedural concerns, while methods should be selected to address relational and process elements of the conflict. For example, the topic selected for the constructive controversy exercise focuses on the development of creative solutions for surface or underlying issues, while the process addresses the relationship by potentially improving communication, increasing efficacy in problem solving, building trust, facilitating a more nuanced understanding of self, other, and the issues, and increasing commitment to cooperation and integrative negotiating (Johnson, Johnson, and Tjosvold 2006, 11-17). There is a reason why contact is the commonality between conflict and

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<sup>24</sup>The military does this on a smaller scale with Soldiers returning from combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.

conflict resolution. The challenge is to create an environment that increases the likelihood that the contact will be positive.

### Recommendations

#### Do Not Underestimate the Effects of Emotion

Throughout this paper, the effect of emotions on conflict has been a reoccurring theme. It is important that the U.S. appreciates these effects and adjusts their expectations and strategies accordingly. It must realize that it is approaching the conflict from an entirely different perspective than the insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan and avoid the trap of projecting their own objectivity and rationality on their adversary. For the insurgent the conflict is significantly more emotional for two primary reasons.

First, the conflict is being fought in their homes. Though these conflicts are not technically intrastate conflicts, they share many of the same dynamics for the locals. Because attacks occur among the population, the conflict permeates their lives. Additionally, they never get a respite from it. Some claim that the average American is only conscious of the war for fifteen minutes a day during the evening news. Even Soldiers rotate in and out of the combat zone to decompress and regain relative objectivity. There is no rotation for Iraqis and Afghanis. This prevents the cooling of emotions and limits de-escalation.

Second, opposition leaders frame the conflict as a religious or culture war for them. Religious and cultural conflicts are intensely emotional and personal. They are viewed as moral or value conflicts because parties believe that there is a fundamental incompatibility in core beliefs. These beliefs are central to how groups define themselves, pass their collective legacy to future generations, and secure eternal life. Any

compromise is a threat to the individual, group, future generations, and their souls. It is largely irrelevant whether or not there is a true incompatibility. If they believe there is, the chances of finding a peaceful resolution is minimal. The hope is in identifying and emphasizing compatibilities, while decreasing the saliency of legitimate incompatibilities.

The U.S. has mistakenly projected their objectivity on an opponent before. It approached Vietnam very rationally, developing mathematical formulas to determine what it would take to win the war. Through a combination of annihilation, attrition, and exhaustion, the U.S. attempted to bend the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong to its will. The U.S. became increasingly confused and irritated when decisive victories, mounting casualty, and crippled industrial capacity did not cause the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong to choose an economically rational course of action and surrender. Policy makers failed to realize that because of strong negative emotions the situation had ceased to be rational for the Vietnamese. Thus, the level of suffering and privation they were willing to endure was far greater than the U.S. anticipated. The U.S. experience is not devoid of this level of emotion either. When the hardships that Revolutionary Soldiers endured are considered, it is staggering. The time period is often cited for Americans differing willingness to endure hardship, but an equally plausible explanation is the relative level of emotion driving the parties. The Revolutionary War was understandably more emotional for Americans than the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are. The threat was more imminent and pervasive. Redeploying was not an option.

## Increase Understanding of Conflict Dynamics

### Increase Exposure

Expose military leaders to concepts and theories from multiple schools of conflict resolution. Literature abounds in the political science, international affairs, and social psychology disciplines that explores the dynamics and offers suggestions for the resolution of intense conflicts resistant to amelioration. It is criminal that military professionals are not exposed to this literature during their careers. Though it is not often seen in this light, the military's primary purpose is to successfully resolve its countries most intense conflicts. Traditionally, it has used force to accomplish this, but increasingly it is using other methods.

Even in wars of conquest the vanquished must accept the victor's leadership to successfully conclude the war. Gaining their acquiescence is tantamount to effective conflict resolution. This is where Napoleon failed in Spain and the Soviets failed in Afghanistan. Militarily they dominated, but they were only able to suppress the conflict, never capable of truly resolving it. Suppressing the conflict required constant pressure to enforce compliance. This drained resources and led to continuous, if not, high casualties. Eventually, the costs of occupation outweighed the benefits. As a result, they withdrew defeated by a seemingly inferior opponent. One could argue that wars are not won by winning battles. They are won by effectively resolving conflicts between parities.

This deficiency in exposure could be remedied by incorporating literature from different fields into the military's professional military education system and sending military officers to graduate programs focused on conflict resolution. This will expose

military professionals to the most current research and theory in the field. It would provide new insights and strategies to better to inform decision-making and execution.

It is important that this exposure is to multiple fields and schools of thought because it is very difficult to break paradigms without exposure to differing perspectives and concepts. Currently, military thought is dominated by the realist perspective on conflict, and thus, it defaults to a statist based approaches for intervention. The military's lack of exposure to differing perspectives has resulted in organizational group think with respect to conflict analysis and resolution. Because of this groupthink, the preponderance of learning that has occurred over the past nine years has been the result of a painful iterative trial and error process. When the cost of learning is often measured in lives, the price is too high not to use existing theory to inform analysis and strategy development.

### Actively Collaborate

While the military might be the segment of the U.S. population most affected by the current international armed conflict, it is not the only body actively pursuing its successful resolution. There are a host of organizations dedicated to reducing the effects of conflict and developing new strategies for intervention. The United States Institute for Peace (USIP), International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution, and Beyond Intractability contain a host of individuals who have dedicated their professional lives to the study of conflict and its successful resolution. They could provide new perspectives, insights, and possible strategies for the military.

The military has shown marked improvement in working with non-military organizations to develop solutions for the challenges they face in country. It is time it shows the same due diligence before deployment, actively collaborating with the

academic community to discover more effective strategies to guide military efforts. Both communities would benefit from this collaboration. The military would gain new perspectives on conflict and methods for engagement and provide academic circles with experiences and feedback that could refine their theories and models.

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